The Past

By: Emrood

Before Jet Set Radio Future, there were a couple of misfits who were winging it in the streets. This is their story. [Takes place as if there was no JGR]

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The Past

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Back, Before, Now

The Past

2025, on the other side of the world, surrounded by water, into a city called Tokyo, and a section called Dogenzaka Hill, a lone teenager lived toughing out the streets that he had quickly learned to call home at a young age. Escaping from cops and spreading his signature on walls of buildings was what he did best since he had dropped out of school. His cold disposition and tough guy attitude warded off others rapidly, keeping him an urchin of the streets. Anyone who knew him was sure that nothing could ever change him, and the dangers that lurked around him scared them, forcing them to call the police to keep guard.

On the bottom floor of an old apartment building, lay sleeping a boy of seventeen years in age. It didn't bother him that the only things in this room were two old couches, a radio that was on top of a stool and a few magazines. The only other rooms in the rundown apartment was a bathroom, which only kept the things that were necessary such as a toothbrush and toothpaste, hair gel, a towel, a brush and cologne, along with the toilet, sink and shower, and a small room which was meant for a kitchen. That room was basically empty except for Chinese food boxes lying about from his late dinner the other day and a small cooler which held soda cans and beer.

The teen shifted in his sleep, waking himself up. He sat up, the blanket falling off the couch he had been sleeping on, and went to the bathroom. He looked at himself in the cracked mirror, observing his own face. He looked so much different than the last time he had taken the time to see himself. He had a strong jaw, structured build, and soft brown eyes that held a mystery behind them. He had a very expressional face, which could easy let someone know if they were annoying him or entertaining him, which hardly ever happened. He slowly ran his fingers over a scar on the left side of his chest,

remembering the incident. It was when a man had been chasing a random kid of the streets. It was when bullets went zooming through the air, straight at innocent people. It was the last time the boy saw his parents alive.

Not a very easily emotional person, the teen clenched his teeth and balled the hand that had been touching the scar into a tight fist. He would never forgive or forget that day, when they sheeted up his parents' bodies and drove them away before he had passed out, taking him into a separate van to the hospital. The man responsible didn't look regretful as he crossed his arms over his chest, proud that he had killed the boy who he was trying to originally chase down. He flashed his badge and disappeared into a patrol car, ready to reward himself for his deed.

After realizing at age eight that he was never going to see his parents again, the boy took his place in the streets, planning revenge against the man who caused him so much pain and a dead future. The boy had been alone since his parent's deaths, and he would complete his mission the same way. He removed what he had on and stepped into the shower, turning on the water and letting it run over him. The only thing that worked in the building was cold water, and he was thankful for that. He only had to watch out for the cold when it came, but it never bothered him that much.

Stealing had become a natural talent for him, which was how he had anything that hadn't been there before he had come to live there. He made a mental note for himself that he needed some soap next time he went out. Still, a shower was better than no shower. He turned the water off, dripping as he stepped out of the tub and onto the floor, grabbing his towel and drying himself with it. He tied it around himself and squeezed some toothpaste out onto his toothbrush, cleaning his teeth evenly. He made sure he didn't use too much, knowing he would have to go steal more.

Taking his brush, he dunked it into the tub of gel, combing his hair into place neatly. Just because he didn't have much cash didn't mean he couldn't look good. He hand washed his clothes every other day and fixed his sneakers whenever he needed to. That wasn't necessary though, for he usually wore his roller blades. They were about the most expensive thing he owned, next to his

headphones which played any radio station he wanted them to, but he only listened to the one worth hearing. Jet Set Radio.

Pulling off some lint and straightening it out, he pulled on his yellow shirt that had round spikes on the shoulders where it was black. He had a few designs on his shirt that spelled out Beat, which he had come to call himself. After pulling up his black jeans, he buckled his belt and sprayed himself with cologne, leaving the bathroom. His stomach growled, but he ignored this, knowing he never ate breakfast. As long as he could eat once a day, he was fine. Beat picked up the blanket and rolled it into a ball, placing it back on the couch and bending over to look under.

Hidden was his disguise whenever he would go to steal. His large headphones with antennas sticking out on the sides, large blue tinted goggles that covered most of the top of his head, and of course, his gloves and black and green blades. Suiting up, he sighed, wishing he knew when he was ever going to have a chance to do something about the police force. Not that there was a big chance that an uneducated teen from the streets could do anything about it, but he would never give up. The day his parents died he promised he never would.

Grabbing the old empty cartons from his dinner before, he opened the door, the sunlight greeting him a happy morning as he felt it was a miserable one. He added his garbage to the pile that was in front of the building next to his and skated around, stretching himself out. Hearing a police siren, he quickly ducked back into the alley from which he had come, waiting for the car to pass. "Someday…" he growled, glaring from behind his goggles.

He skated out and down the street, heading to where everyone else went for shopping. A large crowd entered into a small gift shop, with Beat right behind them. Sneaking in with them, he quickly skated into an aisle, at first grabbing a black backpack for visitors to buy when they went to amusement parks. He glanced around snatching deodorant, razors, shaving cream, soap, a very small travel size bottle of shampoo, toothpaste, some more gel and packs of chips. While he did this, he tore off the price tags so they wouldn't ring when he would leave. Not wanting to look too suspicious, he grabbed a bottle of soda that he could finish quickly and brought it to

the counter, buying it with some of the money he actually had. With the bag on his back and looking nothing more than a tourist, he skated out of the place without a worry.

He usually chose the cheaper places to steal from, the ones that couldn't afford cameras or ringers in the front. This was his living. Opening the soda, he took a sip, refreshing the morning and satisfying his stomach. He sat at a table in front of a café, sitting under the shade of the umbrella that was attached to the table. It was going to be an extremely hot day. Even early in the morning, he could still observe the girls that would walk around, some dressed ridiculously, others entertainingly. Either way, it was something for him to do as he planned in his head how he would get back at that policeman who killed off his life.

In a flash, his table was knocked over as a boy sped right by him, falling down with the table. Beat glanced over the fallen table, watching the other trying to get up quickly, as soon as he did, he continued his way in a panic, disappearing into the distance. Beat arched an eyebrow, wondering what the other boy could be running from. Picking up the table and about the place the umbrella back on, sirens caught Beat's attention. He observed as three police cars zoomed right passed him in the same direction as the boy had been running. Beat shook his head and skated off, "Run kid…run."

Author's Note: It hasn't been a while since I posted a JSRF fic. (looks guilty) Well, I've been writing other fics, but this will be good! I promise!

A New Friend

A New Friend

"After him!" the signal reported in every police car after the teen. The boy skated as fast as he could, but the cars were catching up to him. The sun's glare was no problem for the boy as his sunglasses protected his vision, but he was extremely tired and almost too hot to move. As he skated, he continually pulled at his collar to make sure his hood wouldn't suffocate him. His breathing increased and his legs began to cramp up. His green hair dripped with sweat, but he couldn't give up.

He wouldn't go back to the shelter, they couldn't make him. Every foster home he had gone to was horrible, either too many kids, too little care, or just a love of money to have him. And with each one, he had run away. The cops had always caught him before, but he wouldn't let that happen this time. He was going to be free from the last deathtrap, but as his legs weakened and his side began to cramp up, his dream became less of a reality.

"Have…to…keep…going…" he winced, finding himself trapped. The cars stopped, emptying out the flood of cops, each holding a gun or handcuffs. The boy leaned against the brick wall he was trapped against and slid down, ready to be brought back pitifully. He lost his focus as sweat soaked his hood and his breathing deepened. He heard screaming and a sound like when girls would fix their hair with hairspray. He was suddenly dragged up and shaken, cold liquid splashing in his face, waking him up.

"Get up! Start walking!"

The boy did as he was ordered to, not consciously knowing what he was doing. He felt the coldness of shade relieve him of the heat, and he took a deep breath, opening his eyes. Before him stood another teen, taller than him with auburn hair, but the rest of the features were hidden because of all the gear. The shorter boy looked around the corner of a building from where they were hiding and watched as

the few cops that were left were leaving with a rainbow of colors sprayed all over their jackets.

He turned, realizing he was alone. He squinted, seeing that the guy who had saved him wasn't too far off. "Wait up, yo!" he yelled, running after him. Not knowing that the boy was calling him, Beat continued to skate off, but stopped when the other boy ran in front of him, breathing hard. "T-thanks, yo! Wh..why'd you..do it?" he managed to say in between breathes.

Beat glanced at him and continued skating. The other boy blinked and followed, "And how'd you do it, yo? I could never hold off the whole squad that was after me! You came outta nowhere yo! And then with the screaming and the running and…the…" he stopped as Beat looked at him, a warning for him to shut up. This didn't keep the kid quiet though. "So…what's ya name, yo?"

Beat growled and stopped skating, "Look, I did you a favor, now do me one and get lost." He began to skate off again, leaving the kid in an awkward stand. Beat tossed the bottle he had poured out on the kid into a public trashcan and decided he should drop off the things on his back to his place. He turned around to head home, facing the teen again, "I don't got no where to go, yo."

Beat glared at him, "Then why don't you hunt down those cops and ride with them! I'm sure they'll give you a nice cell to sleep in." he finished icily. Unaffected by the tone, the other shook his head, "No, they're trying to stick me into a foster home." Beat stared at the kid, "And you're running away from that?"

The boy nodded, "It's not what it cuts out to be."

Beat began to skate, "Better than the streets."

"No way, yo."

Beat ignored the boy and left him. He made his way to his street, and eyed his alley. His home.

"Wow…"

Beat spun around to find the same kid, but with yellow skates on.

"Are you following me!" Beat scowled, thinking of how daring this kid was. "You live here?" asked the other, ignoring the other question. "None of your business, now I said get lost before. Trust me, you don't want to get me angry." Beat said darkly, curling his fingers into fists. The other thought about the warning, but chanced it anyway. "Are you a rudie?" he asked quietly.

Beat stared at him. No one had asked him such a question before. No one had ever asked him anything before, after he was out on the streets, but something so serious and dangerous to a reputation, never. The question wandered around in Beat's head, making him decide what to say. Who was this kid anyway, and could he be trusted? Rudies had connections of information that he could use to get to the police.

Beat watched the teen as he watched Beat. " *His wrist* …" thought Beat, glancing at a black, square watch. He knew those watches, almost every rudie had one, but this kid didn't look like a rudie. "Are you one?" he asked.

"Just starting out," he admitted, "I'm finally out of the homes…so…" This kid wouldn't know much about anything. Beat sighed, and turned, ready to go into the alley. "Where you goin', yo?" asked the kid, following him again. "I told you before nicely to go away. And now my patience is *on the line* , buddy!" Beat said warningly. The boy glanced at him with a tired look, sweat dripping down his face.

"Yeah…but…you got-"

The kid swooned back and collapsed. Beat looked back in surprise, and ignored it for a moment, about to head in, but something told him it was wrong. He opened his door, standing there for a minute, his gut feeling telling him to go back. Beat threw the bag on the floor grumpily and skated back to where the unconscious boy was. He dragged him to the smaller couch, which he fit neatly on, and left him there.

Jumping into reality, the boy opened his eyes and breathed deeply, looking around to see where he was. Apparently he was alone, but

in someone's house. They weren't very rich though, as he saw the walls were crumbling and there wasn't that much furniture in the room. He could see a blue bathroom from where he was and a kitchen he could look right into. It was more of a half wall that separated the kitchen from the room he was in.

Rubbing his head, he realized he was missing two things. His hood, which was on the armrest of the couch he was laying on, and his watch, which was no where to be found. He pulled at his thin T-shirt, slowly pulling the sweaty material off his back. He went to the bathroom and washed his face, after looking into the mirror and seeing that his face was red. He had the deepest urge for water, so he stuck his head under the faucet, drinking as much as he could before he would get a nauseous feeling. He dried his face with his shirt and decided to explore the place. The apartment was pretty cool for the heat outside being so unbearable.

He turned on the radio and smiled as DJ K's voice filled the room and turned it back off. Only rudies listened to Jet Set Radio. Maybe this guy could help him out. Teach him the basics and perhaps even get into a gang. He unstrapped his skates and placed them beside the couch he was laying on, removed his socks and felt much better. He could tell whoever lived here skated too, for there were skate scratches against the wood floor. He sat on the couch he had started out on and noticed the pile of magazines to the side. Picking one up, he blushed as the pictures portrayed inappropriate photos of models.

The door clicked, and the boy flung the magazine nervously. "Had a nice nap?" Beat asked sarcastically, knowing what the other had been doing. The boy was about to answer, but saw his watch on Beat's wrist. "That's mine!" he yelled, startling Beat for a second. Beat placed the flat box he had and sodas on the counter, "Calm down, I was just borrowing it. Least you could do for me since I saved your life. **Twice** ."

The kid flustered as he glared at Beat, "But…that-I…Mmmm…what do you need that for! You have a headset *and* radio, yo! There's nothing special about that watch, just give it back. Are you listening to me!"

Beat sighed and glared back, "You ask WAY too many questions, you know that? And if nothing's special about it, why do you want it back so badly?"

The kid stood quiet, looking at the floor in a grunt. Beat opened the flat box, releasing the smell of pizza in the apartment, making both their stomachs grumble. He tossed a soda at the complainer, "Drink something, you almost had a heat stroke today. Who the hell wears a hood in this heat?"

The other didn't answer, only opened the soda and drank. Beat tore a slice of pizza from the rest and chomped it down, admiring the watch. "Don't touch my watch with your hands all greasy." warned the kid, getting up. Beat glanced at him, "Don't assume things." Beat stopped looking at the watch when the short boy wouldn't stop glaring, "What's your name?"

"Yoshiharu…"

Beat snorted while drinking his soda, receiving acid bubbles in his nose, "And you're gonna be a rudie with a name like that?"

"Well, duh I need a new one. Everyone has a *real* name." the noob growled, "And who are you oh *supreme* one?" Beat finished his soda and crushed the can in his hand, "Beat."

The new rudie's eyes widened, "…Beat?"

"Yeah."

"Beat!"

"I said yes already!" answered Beat, getting annoyed. "You're the one who tried to mug my friend!" Yoshi yelled angrily. Beat glanced at him, "Well…don't take it personally, but to make some money, it's either day on and off jobs, or mugging." Seeing that this wasn't making the kid any happier, Beat sighed, "If you wanna be a rudie, I'm sure you're gonna hafta learn to do that and more, and if you hate me already, then there's no way you can live on the streets. Living on the streets requires patience, smarts, and most of all, guts. And right now, you're failing in everything." Beat replied with a smirk.

"You're not a rudie! You're a wannabe! And you're stealing my watch for who knows what and mockin' me in my face. Give me my damn watch, yo!" he growled, stretching his hand out for it. Beat laughed, this kid was entertaining. He hadn't had a good laugh in a while. "You expect me to just…hand it over?" Beat chuckled, shaking his head.

He received silence as an answer. "I said I'm just borrowing it, okay? Calm down before you give yourself a heart attack and shut up." Beat said, glancing at the watch once more. He could put it to good use. "So, any idea what you're going to do now?" he asked, staring at the watch.

Yoshiharu remained quiet.

" *Hello?* "

"You talkin' to me, yo?"

Beat looked up with a smirk, "No, I wanted to talk to a watch." The kid glared, "Well, you're staring at it like it was *yours* !"

"Just answer the damn question."

"I don't know what I'm gonna do! I told you I *just* got out from the homes!" he scowled, rolling his hood into a ball for a pillow. "So, who you're gonna trust? You got anybody already in the streets?" asked Beat, leaving the watch alone. The short boy shrugged and sighed, "I dunno…"

Beat snorted, "Why don't you go back with your parents? Behave and all that. You'll die out here."

The kid shot up, "This is all I have left." Beat brought the box to him with a few slices and took the bag he looted from the store with all the goods to the bathroom. As Beat put the things away, he realized that he hadn't talked that much since he was out on his own. He wasn't used to his own voice, and it scared him a little. But he needed this kid out. He had done his good deed, now that was it.

A loud gurgling burp broke his thoughts, and he looked out the doorway to see the kid tossing the box to the corner. "Dude…I left

four slices in there…" Beat said in awe. The boy smiled sheepishly, "I haven't eaten in three days…"

"So, it was heat and lack of energy." Beat summed up, knowing why he had passed out before. The young boy shrugged, "Hey, Beat? Why'd you help me out?"

Beat looked at Yoshi and picked up the empty box of pizza ready to be thrown out, "Well, don't take this personally, but when someone's got the cops riled up, there's nothing more I'd rather do than just screw it up even more for them."

"Oh…"

"And I wasn't expecting a shadow to be following me home, either." Beat added, sitting on his couch and poking at the watch once again. He couldn't wait to figure out if his plan would actually work. "Okay, why are you so obsessed with my watch, yo?"

Beat looked up, facing the teen who was staring back. "Why are you so obsessed with saying 'yo' all the time?" Yoshi smiled, embarrassed, "It's a habit…" Beat shook his head, "Back to your question, I'm gonna use this watch to catch police broadcasts so I can find this guy who's up in the ranks there."

Yoshi arched an eyebrow, "Why don't ya just listen to Jet Set Radio, yo?"

"Because I've already tried that, *yo* ."

The redhead smirked as Yoshi glared at him. "Not funny, yo!" Beat snorted, unable to hold his laugh in. The shorter teen fumed as Beat leaned his head back on the couch backrest to support himself. He sighed a breath to relieve himself from the laughing lack of air.

"Yooooooo!" Beat cracked up, unable to control himself. The kid stood up angrily, "Shut UP!" Beat smirked, "And what if I don't?"

"I'll leave." the kid answered dangerously.

Beat arched an eyebrow, "Whoooo! Scary! Take the trash out with you." Yoshi walked to the door, "Yeah sure, and I'll be sure to let the

cops know where their little pinpoint is hangin' out." Beat's face became serious, the way it was always.

The other smiled a magnificent wicked grin that showed all his perfectly straight teeth in a row, "Hmm…"

Beat glared at him.

"Look, all I need is someone to teach me the ropes, and you're sour enough to prove that you've been out here a while-"

"No you don't! I'm no one's stupid babysitter! Get your crap and get out of my house!"

"I'll be taking my watch then!"

Beat glanced at his wrist, "I think I'll be keeping it."

Yoshi shrugged, "Your loss. The police station is only a few blocks away…" Beat stood up angrily, "You *do* realize that you'll be selling yourself out, don't you?" Yoshi shrugged again, "I can always run away from where I'm sent to, but you'll be the one stuck behind cold bars."

Beat glared at him from behind his blue tinted goggles, almost making them fog up with his heated face, "Shut the door." he said irritably. Yoshi smiled and did as told, sitting on the smaller couch, making it squeak. "So, roomie, what's first on the list?" he smiled.

"We get some things straight." Beat said, walking up to the relaxed kid. "First of all, I'm not your *roomie* . Second of all, you better not get in my way, third, you shut up when I tell you to, forth, you don't bug me for food, and fifth, you clean up after yourself, cause I can't stand pigs!"

Yoshi stared at the towering teen, wondering if this was how all other rudies started out.

Starting Out

Starting Out

Beat stared at the floor as he leaned hunched over his legs, sitting on his couch wondering what he was going to do now that he had extra luggage with him. Maybe it was just him, but he found this new roommate extremely annoying. Beat shook his head. Why now did he have to start protecting others, getting into business that wasn't his, and setting himself up for a training session to become something he wasn't?

"Hey…"

Beat looked up, seeing that he was being watched. "What." he answered flatly.

"Well…since I'm gonna be staying here, I guess I should tell ya why I'm out here in the first place. Like you said, there's gotta be trust somewhere, right?" Yoshi said in more of a question.

"And you're trusting me." Beat answered flatly again. "Guess so…no one else *to* trust." replied Yoshi, "Can't trust strangers…can't trust friends…can't trust police…" Beat leaned on the back of his couch and listened.

"My parents were great, yo. Really awesome…we hardly argued… never fought…even when school wasn't going great for me, they would still give me that extra push without gettin' me all stressed…" Yoshi started, talking more to his hands than to Beat. "Then…on a weekend…we went for a drive to go see a game…and coming home…a drunk driver smashed into our car with his jeep in a head on collision…"

Beat watched as the boy before him began to get choked up as he closed his eyes, picturing the event replaying the horror in his mind. He continued telling the story with his eyes closed tightly, "I watched my parents get crushed and I reached for my mom's purse…she had a cell phone…and I called the police for help…"

He suddenly opened his eyes, fire burning within them, "But they thought I was some kid wasting their time…they thought it was a lie! It's their fault my parents are *gone* !" Yoshi covered his face, feeling the pain burning inside. He had totally forgotten that Beat was there, it was just something he needed to get out, and now he finally did after four years of holding it in.

Beat tilted his head in amusement; maybe this kid wasn't so different from him. Beat looked at Yoshi as he realized he was with Beat and stared down, embarrassed that he had broke down like that. "I'll help you, if you help me." Beat offered, ready to make a deal. "Whaddya mean?" asked Yoshi, wiping his nose on his arm.

Wincing, Beat leaned forward, "You have something against these pathetic Rokakku Police, I have something against them, too. You look the type who's trying to get any info you can about them and their leaders, and I need that information. That's the reason why I need your watch. While you help me get to the top gun in the police force, I can help you tough out the streets. Who knows, you might even get yourself into a good gang." Beat smirked, knowing the offer was too good for the noob to turn down.

Yoshi thought about what Beat had just said and blinked. It all seemed even enough. "Alright, yo. It's a deal."

Beat smirked, "You and your yo's."

Yoshi sighed. Beat got up, heading to the bathroom, "It could be your trademark, dude."

Yoshi's face scrunched into thought mode, hatching an idea, " *Or* … my new name…"

Beat sat on the longer couch and scratched his head. This kid was taking forever in the bathroom, but it was better he was clean than Beat having to smell a nasty stink the whole night. The door clicked and Yoyo stepped out with his shorts on, putting his T-shirt on to sleep. "Used the towel that was there, hope you don't mind." he said carelessly, throwing himself on the shorter couch.

Beat rolled his eyes, "Whatever."

He had washed his hair, but unlike Beat's, Yoshi's hair was fuller and it resembled that of a sopping mop now that it was wet, sticking up all over the place. He huffed on his shades and cleaned them with his shirt, folding them and placing them on the armrest. He rolled up his hood into a pillow and rolled over on his stomach, cuddling his head into the hood.

"Comfy?" Beat mocked, removing his shirt and pulling the blanket over himself. "Yeah." Yoshi answered relaxed. He sat up quickly, startling Beat, "I got a question!"

"Geez…" Beat sighed, moving around on his couch, "What?"

"Do you get roaches?"

"No." Beat answered, disgusted. Yoshi nodded thankfully, "Just making sure I don't get any night visits. This last place I was stayin' at-"

"I don't need an insider." Beat hissed quickly.

"Okay…do you talk in your sleep?"

"No."

Yoshi shifted uncomfortably and Beat arched an eyebrow, "If *you* do, just try to mutter quietly." Nodding self-consciously, Yoshi laid back, and Beat assumed that the questioning was over with. He turned over, facing the back of the couch and sighed, ready to sleep.

"So what's your story?"

Beat opened his half closed eyes fully. "Aren't you tired?" Yoshi sat up, "Well, I never really fall asleep until around…eleven thirty to midnight, yo." Beat looked at the watch he was still wearing, "It's one."

Yoshi smiled sheepishly, "Well…honestly…you're the only person I told my story to since it happened." Beat nodded, "Yeah, you looked like you were ready to explode." "There's gotta be a reason…" the

kid wondered, pulling a knee close enough to lean his own cheek on. Beat pulled the cover over himself up to his ear and shunned Yoshi out, "I just *have* my reasons against the cops."

Yoshi blinked, "Oh…" Beat waited for something else to come out of the kid, but nothing did. Under the covers, he pressed the screen of the watch, making it light up in the darkness. The teen squinted as he saw three words on the side of the screen. Radio, Time, Walkie Talkie. "Walkie talkie?" Beat muttered quietly.

"Yeah, but you need to get the other's VT address though."

Beat twitched and turned, seeing the young boy watching him from the other couch. Beat sighed and sat up, "Yeah. Thanks for the note." Yoshi's mind thought over and over what the police had done to upset this guy so badly that he treated everyone with a cold shoulder. "Beat?"

Beat glanced at him, "What?"

"…what happened?"

"You're not gonna let me sleep, are you?" Beat answered more in a statement than a question. Yoshi shrugged, "I'd sorta like to know why you're so obsessed to get after the cops that you would help a stranger." Beat sat up, kicking off the blanket and stared at the other darkly, "When I was little, a rudie was being chased after while me and my parents were out. Some psycho cop shoots out and gets all of us, instantly killing three people. The kid…and my parents."

Beat was glaring at the floor, looking twenty times angrier than Yoshi had looked, and ready to destroy anything or anyone that answered him. Yoshi curled up and rested his head against his hood, staying quiet. Beat finally looked at him and sat back, calming himself down. "The end."

Yoshi rubbed his neck uncomfortably and stood silent. "Sorry." he said quietly. Beat sighed and laid back down, "Forget it." Beat closed his eyes, awaiting another question, but only even breathing answered. He opened his eyes, unbelieving, and saw Yoshi with his face buried into his hood, finally sleeping. Beat closed his eyes,

"Thank you, *God* !"

The room was silent except for the breathing from the two boys. Beat moved a bit and scratched his head, yawning. He ignored the muttering coming from Yoshi and curled up into his blanket. Yoshi sighed in his sleep, whimpering over his horrible dream. A loud bang woke him out of his nightmare into another one. Spinning off the couch, Yoshi sat wide eyed and looked around. Another bang alarmed him, forcing him to quickly crawl away from the door.

"Beat!"

With no response, Yoshi glanced back at the door, biting his nails. "Beat!"

No answer.

" *Beat!* "

" *WHAT!* "

Yoshi stared at the angered teen with a look of fear, "There's someone at the door!" Beat looked at him grimly, "It was a dream, dude. Go back to sleep."

"I'm not dreamin', yo! Somebody knocked twice!"

Beat yawned and covered his head with his blanket, "You better lay off the six slices of pizza next time. It's giving you 'dreams'." he said with a smirk. Yoshi's eyes widened, "DOES NOT!"

A louder knock interrupted their argument. Yoshi shook Beat, "I told you!" Beat rubbed his eyes, "Check who it is." Yoshi sighed and went to the side window, peeking out the shades. "C-c-c…!" he stared, backing away. Beat sat up and shook his head, kicking off his blanket, "Who is it?"

Yoshi grabbed his things, " *Cops!* "

Beat sighed, "Aw crap…" He stood and placed his goggles,

headphones, skates, and gloves into his blanket and rolled it up, shoving it under the couch while the cops banged on the door angrily, "Open up! Police!"

Beat glanced at Yoshi who was staring at him in panic, holding his items. "Bathroom." he said quickly, grabbing a cap from under the couch. He went to the door and opened it, peeking out first, "What?"

Two helmeted men in white uniform bearing the sign of Rokakku stood at the door, irritated that Beat had answered in such a way, "I think you mean "yes, sir" you little-"

The other officer held his hand out to stop the other, "Have you seen a girl of 5'4", blue eyes, wearing a short green dress, helmet, and traveling on skates?" Beat blinked, "Nope, haven't seen any girl like that." "Then I guess you won't mind us doing a little search." Beat's heart pace sped up, but he didn't show any kind of anxiety. "Sure, go ahead."

The two's expressions went into a bit of shock for Beat's willingness, but entered in anyway. They took in the view and realized they wouldn't find much there. "What's in there?" asked one of the officers. Beat glanced at the door, "A bathroom."

The officer reached for the door, but Beat shook his head and groaned, "I wouldn't open that. I had a bean burrito that did NOT agree with my stomach and…well…there's no window to air out and…" The officer opened the door anyway and Beat held his breath, hoping they wouldn't find his new friend.

The cops glanced around, finding nothing except bathroom supplies and materials. The officers looked at each other and nodded, turning to the front doorway. A pair of red sunglasses peeked out from behind the drawn shower curtain, but Beat shook his head and the slightest sign of the boy disappeared once again into the curtain.

The two officers walked around the apartment, realizing there was no way the teen could hide anyone here. "How old are you?" asked one, glancing back at Beat. "Seventeen." He answered honestly, "My uncle's out, if that's what you wanna know. He works overtime today." The officer nodded understandingly and sighed, "Well, if you

see or hear about this girl we're looking for, inform us."

"Will do." answered Beat, walking them to the door.

"There's a large reward for her *capture* , if you will." The cop finished off and they both went down the alleyway to the next building. Closing the door, he tossed the cap off, "Too close…Yo-ster, they're gone." Yoshi came out, throwing his things on the smaller couch, "What were they looking for?" "Some girl." Beat shrugged, laying on the bigger couch, pulling the blanket out from under.

"A rudie?"

"Who else? That's all these goons look for. Hard core, blood thirsty murderers could be walking down the streets, but they'll start a man hunt for an insignificant teenager."

"Hope she gets out okay…"

Beat glanced at Yoshi, "Sound like you know her."

Yoshi shook his head, "Nah, but I know how it feels to be chased down like that." Beat shrugged and closed his eyes. "Beat?"

" *Oh no!* " thought Beat, rubbing his eyes.

"Beat?"

"….."

"Are you sleepin' already, yo?"

" **Go to sleep, *Yo-yo* !** "

Beat turned, facing the back of his couch while the Yoshi sat on his with a thoughtful smile, " *Yoyo* …"

Author's Note : *And the mystery of how he received his name is solved! (cheesy background music) Or is it? And who might this girl the police are after be? And their pasts…well, they have something*

in common. XD

Learning The Ropes

Learning the Ropes

Beat glanced at the boy on the smaller couch after coming out of the bathroom. Sighing, he shook his head, grabbing his skates and sitting to put them on. Rolling off the couch, Yoshi banged his head on the floor, waking up, "What happened?" he muttered drunkenly.

"Well, you really even out. You sleep extremely late, and you wake up extremely late." Beat told him while strapping on the other skate. "At least I got a peaceful morning."

"Where're you goin, yo?" asked Yoshi, yawning.

"Out."

"But you gotta teach me-" Yoshi started to whine, but Beat cut him off, "Yeah, yeah, I know. Give me some time, peewee."

"Yoyo." Yoshi smiled, putting on his hood. Beat arched an eyebrow, "What?" Yoshi pulled the hood over his head, molding his hair into place and pulled it off again, putting into its usual style, "New name. Yoyo." Beat popped his goggles on, "Whatever. If you're coming, you better hurry up."

Yoshi, now Yoyo, went to the bathroom and closed the door. Beat sighed, realizing this was going to take more work than he thought.

Dogenzaka Hill was bustling with people, for it was a weekend and everyone was out from adults to teenagers and even small children. Yoyo smiled and skated forth, but was pulled back quickly. "What are you doing?" he asked Beat, who was walking away. "I have no idea what you think *you're* doing, but whatever it is, you ain't doin' it here." Beat said crisply.

They reached Shibuya Terminal quickly, and Yoyo stopped Beat.

"Why'd we come here for?"

"If you screw up, I don't want it to be right where I live!"

Yoyo blinked, "Oh…"

Beat picked a small shop, "Step one, choose a store that doesn't look too high tech. That way you can support yourself without getting caught, and you don't look too suspicious." Yoyo nodded and followed Beat to the store. "These are basic survival skills." Beat informed him, whispering quietly. Yoyo grabbed a candy bar and ripped open the wrapper, chomping the chocolate down in a second and threw the wrapper to the side.

Beat glanced at him and Yoyo smiled, "You make it sound like I've never done this before." Beat glared at him from behind his tinted goggles, "Well that information would've been useful, don't you think!" Yoyo smiled innocently and shoved various items into his pockets. "Okay, so you can snag a few things, not a big deal." Beat said as they walked out of the store.

Yoyo tossed Beat a candy bar as he tore open another one for himself, "What's next, boss?"

The two crossed the street slowly while cars honked at them angrily to speed up. They reached the corner and Beat tilted his head thoughtfully. Yoyo stared at him, wondering what he was doing, but was bending over in pain when Beat suddenly threw a punch to his stomach. Having the wind knocked out of him, Yoyo leaned against a building wall for support. When he caught his breath, he glared at Beat, "What the hell was that for, yo!"

Beat shook his head, "You can't live out here if you can't defend yourself and if you're not ready to expect the unexpected." Yoyo rubbed his stomach scornfully and glared. "I know how to fight, I just wasn't *expecting* you to hit me for no damn reason, yo!"

Beat adjusted his goggles, "Need both."

Yoyo continued glaring as Beat made his point, "Cars speed here all the time. They speed everywhere. If you can't protect yourself with a

quick blow, what makes you think you can even cross a street safely?"

Yoyo nodded, still upset about his sore stomach. He agreed with Beat, but felt that he was hit to make him go away. Simple little tests weren't going to scare him away. Not ever again. "Okay, so stealing, taking a beating, …expecting cars to hit me…anything else?" Yoyo muttered, rubbing his stomach. "Never look weak. It makes you an easy target to get mugged. If I didn't know you, I would've probably mugged you and been long gone already." explained Beat without a care.

" *At least he's honest…* " thought Yoyo pitifully. Two cops walked by them, as if they were trying to recognize them, but passed, talking over routines and other usual duties of the day. Beat snorted in disgust as Yoyo shook his head. Beat suddenly pulled Yoyo into a skinny alley that they *just* fit into. Yoyo looked at him curiously, "What's up?"

Beat jerked his head towards the street, "Smell that?"

Yoyo took a whiff, soon wishing he hadn't. The air stank of old, salty fish. "What *is* that, yo?" he asked quickly so the scent wouldn't enter his mouth.

"Poison Jam."

Yoyo raised his eyebrows in wonder. Whatever it was, it *couldn't* be good. Nothing, smelling like that, could be. Loud grumbling laughing that could rattle the ground echoed throughout Shibuya Terminal, egging Yoyo on to look out from their hiding place. Three blue, ugly, reptilian teens were racing around Shibuya, but they weren't alone. A girl with a light green dress and flighter helmet was racing away from them as they chased her with howls and shouts.

"Why they chasing after that girl, yo?" asked Yoyo in a whisper. Beat began on his explanation, "Poison Jam are the three biggest and stupidest rudies out there, so mentally they're not strong, but you don't wanna get caught by them, because they'll tear you apart for fun. Their leader, I've heard, is some mean dude, and a little nuts too. Anyone who's for those guys has gotta be…" he muttered

darkly.

"They're either chasing her because she's got something down with their leader or they're just bored and need a chick." he said, ending. Yoyo squinted, "But which one is the leader? They all look the same!" Beat shook his head, "The leader never travels with them. He probably doesn't want the shame of him leading along a bunch of idiots. Some say he lives down in the sewers, where Poison Jam's HQ is, but even father down than that, so no one can ever find him."

Yoyo nodded as if this was a fairy tale and tilted his head, watching the show. Beat glanced out, and a hard shock hit him. This girl fit the description of the girl the police had asked him about the night before. The boys watched together as two of the Poison Jam goons got around the girl and grabbed her arms, ridding of the spray can she had in her hand. Yoyo whispered, "What was the point of the spray can?"

"If you spray the back of those guys, they'll leave you alone…" Beat murmured, not removing his stare from the girl. Yoyo noticed the change in his tone and looked at him. Beat's head was tilted in a funny way, as if he was looking at modern art in a museum, and his watch was almost a gaze…

"We oughta help her, yo." he said with a smile.

"No."

"No!" Yoyo stared at Beat, "But they're about to gang rape her, dude!" Right now, the supposed speaker of the gang was talking to the girl, but she definitely made the appearance that it wasn't a pleasure to even talk. *She must be smelling the breath* , thought Yoyo. "Why can't we help?"

"She's a rudie, if you help her out, you'll put a huge dent on her rep."

Yoyo sighed and looked on helplessly, "So…if that was me…"

"You'd probably be dead." answered Beat. "They're 'nicer' to girls, if you wanna say it in terms." *Like they'd have a chance* , he added in

thought. She didn't look the type who would give up easily. Actually, she looked just the opposite. She screamed and kicked up, cracking the speaker in the jaw, knocking him backwards and pulling out of the dumbstruck one's grasps. In quick spin, she pulled a can out of nowhere and sprayed them all on their backs and fronts.

Yoyo grinned and whispered, "Whoo!"

Beat also stood with a smile. "Excellent example."

Yoyo looked at Beat from the girl, "Of a *girl* ?" he said with a grin. Beat's cheeks flushed so little that it could be mistaken for the heat, but none the less, he had changed color. Yoyo grinned as Beat backed himself up, "No! I mean of a rudie! That's what you do in a fair fight. Most fights aren't fair though…"

Yoyo nodded, but didn't forget his teasing. "You sure you didn't wanna help her? Or were you just, you know… *shy* ?"

Beat gave him a cold glare, reminding Yoyo of the day before when Yoyo was following him. "I don't get those feelings, dude. It gets in the way of life, and if you wanna be a rudie, you can't let yourself fall for those feelings either."

The girl was dusting herself off when the alarm sounded that startled all of them from their actions. The alarm that would send fear into all their hearts. The sounds of a police siren.

Author's Note : *Sorry, haven't updated in a while, but I'm working on the finishing of this story. (I usually finish a story and then post up the chapters every few days so I'm not too stressed.) Hoping its pleasing and enjoy.*

- Who is this girl and will Poison Jam be a bother in the future? Will Beat ever do anything that isn't hateful towards his new buddy? And this girl Poison Jam was after, who is she? A friend or foe? -

Her Name Is Gum

Her Name Is Gum

The sounds of the sirens soon came so close, they penetrated through their minds, blinding them. The cars sped around the girl and the thee fallen boys, closing them in. "Aw man!" sighed Yoyo, but Beat was more interested in who was climbing out of the first patrol car.

And it was who he expected.

The slim man stepped out of the car, standing in his own ego as if he were about to walk down a red carpet. Fixing the buttons of his jacket, he adjusted his badge and walked up to the girl who was already being handcuffed. The Poison Jammers were already in the cars, but one was still passed out. "So I see you've helped us catch three we've been after, but stupidly, your plan has backfired, hasn't it?" cooed the man, the sun shining off his boney face that would scare anyone who messed with him. He smiled a devilish smile that would make his own friends smack him, if he had friends.

"Hayashi…" the girl said through her clenched teeth. The man held out his hand and another officer placed a clipboard on it. Hayashi licked his thumb and ruffled through some pages before finding the one he wanted. In this act, he took his time, enjoying every moment that the girl had to suffer wearing the painfully tight handcuffs behind her back. "Let's see here, shall we? Hmmm…my…what a bad child…and at such a young age, too…" he smiled, flipping the board to show the girl her own profile.

"I think this is you?"

The girl looked down, ashamed to be caught. Hayashi turned it again and read aloud a few of her crimes, "Well, well! Graffiti on private property, destruction of government property, vandalism and disruption of the peace in various areas of town…and known for luring innocent males into alleys to mug them. How inventive!" he cracked, letting the original papers fall on her profile. He banged her

head with the clipboard, "I believe you're known as Gum?"

"Yeah, and how long have you been knowing that name? Four years now?" the girl finally said with a smug smile. Hayashi's smile went flat and a cruel one replace it, "Yes, and I'll finally be able to remove it from my memory forever." he said, waving around a pink letter from his pocket.

From their hiding spot, Yoyo could see the girl's toughness suddenly vanish. Her face paled quickly and she put on a beaten expression. She didn't put up a fight as she was placed into a separate car from the Poison Jam boys and locked in. Beat's temper took hold of him, and he was about to walk out when Yoyo pulled him back and covered his mouth.

For such a short kid, he was actually strong. Strong enough to keep Beat back and muffled until the police cars left with the hostages. Yoyo let go and Beat cursed at him, "Why the hell did you do that for!"

"Look, I know you might've wanted to help her, but think about it! I might be a rookie at all this, but I'm not stupid! You go out there and they'll shoot you!" Yoyo said, waving his arms around. Beat slid out of the alley, still filled with anger, "It wasn't about her!" he growled, startling Yoyo. Yoyo stared at him as he also slid out, "It wasn't?"

"No!" Beat shouted so loud that several people stared at him. "Did you see him? A good glance at that skinny bastard!"

He shook Yoyo so hard that his hair went up on end and his glasses fell off. "Y-yeah?" he whispered back. Beat let Yoyo go, and he banged against the back of a building wall. "That was him." Beat said with hatred, "That was the asshole that killed my parents."

Neither of them spoke for a long while, even as they skated to get something to eat. Beat went into an oriental stop-and-go food pick up and led Yoyo to an outside table to eat. He pulled out a box of lomein for himself and a fork, pushing the bag to Yoyo. Yoyo pulled out an eggrole and took a few tastes of it, but placed it on his napkin and left it alone. He had never seen anyone that angry before. Not even *he* felt that way about the police, and they had let him down

with his parents. But he supposed it was much worse to have the number one people to trust kill your parents.

Beat scraped the bottom of the box with his fork and sighed. Yoyo was looking out into the street, as if to replay the scene they had seen only a few minutes ago. Beat pushed the box aside and looked in the same direction Yoyo was, "Hey…sorry about…before."

Yoyo looked at him spooked, for he had broken his train of thought. "Sorry…? Oh! Don't be, yo. I mean, you got every right to be angry." Beat nodded, "Yeah, I do. It wouldn't be normal not to be mad. But, its not your fault. So, I'm sorry about that."

Yoyo smiled with a nod, "Oh, yeah. Forget it, yo. That's what friends are for, right?"

Beat looked at Yoyo who looked like a kid that had been dragged out of the little rascals. He was so open to the world and so…unlike Beat in every way. Well, almost every way. Even though they were as different as could be, they still shared that same orphan road. The same emotions, even if one was more extreme than the other, Yoyo could honestly say he understood how Beat felt. Beat nodded at the new word, "Yeah…friends."

A while after, as the two wandered around aimlessly, Yoyo muttered, "I wonder if she's okay…" Beat glanced at him, "Oh, I was kinda distracted, I forgot to tell you. That was the same girl they were looking for the other day. And for the count, that's twice you've said that."

Yoyo blushed, caught, and shrugged, "I guess it's in me to worry about girls. I know I shouldn't," he quickly saved after receiving a look from Beat, "but…I've always looked at them as something you gotta take care of." Beat shook his head, "Yeah well get that notion out of your head or find some girl who'll appreciate that. Chicks nowadays wanna do anything a guy can."

Yoyo sighed, "I didn't say…forget it."

They slowly slinked to Dogenzaka Hill when Yoyo brought up another point, "Why did she look all scared when the old man

showed her that pink sheet?"

Beat slid his hands into his pockets, a sign that he didn't want to answer, but he did anyway. "A new law. Any rudie who's caught gets killed personally by Captain Hayashi." Yoyo's eyes widened behind his shades, "He can't do that! It's against-"

"Not when the action is a law itself." Beat cut in sadly. Yoyo glared at the ground, "But, okay that list didn't sound so innocent, but c'mon yo! That's way too harsh!" Beat only nodded in agreement, "I know, but Rokkaku is law. And that's what you're training up for. You're one of the new recruits on his way to bring him down."

Yoyo blinked and placed his hand on Beat's shoulder, "Well, you're not gonna let a fellow solider go down by himself, are ya?"

"Sickeningly, you've made me start thinking about joining a gang." Beat smirked, skating towards the usual street. Yoyo smiled, "Ya never know, yo. We might even be in the same one." Beat arched an eyebrow, "Now that would be scary." Yoyo chuckled, but suddenly became serious, "We gotta help her!"

Beat was searching through his keys, "What are you talking about?" "That girl! Gum, I think it was, we gotta help her! She'll be mince meat by tomorrow! Mince meat with holes!" he added, remembering he had seen a gun in the holder of the old man.

Beat banged the key to the side of the hole, missing it in shock. He set it right and opened the door, "Yoyo, what did I tell you before about rudies?" Yoyo rolled his eyes, "Yeah, I know but this is life or death, yo! LIFE OR DEATH!" he shouted, making Beat's eyes widen. Yoyo's voice was on the verge of a break.

"We both heard what Hayashi said! Didn't you see her face when he said it? And you *know* you wanna be her knight in shining armor, yo." Yoyo grinned with a lead.

Beat sat on the bigger couch, "Yeah, I heard what he said, yeah I saw her face, but no, I really don't like saving people." Yoyo looked around the room hopelessly, as if he would find the answer that way. An instant flash went aglow in Yoyo's mind. He crossed his arms

behind him, "I guess you're right, you're no good at saving people. I guess Hayashi'll just get the satisfaction of shooting down another innocent from this world…"

Yoyo watched as Beat thought out the same idea and his expression became dark. Yoyo knew he shouldn't mess around like that, but he wanted to save that girl. He knew when he could be useful, and now was that time. Yoyo took a step forward, "You know Hayashi would kill anyone who would even think about freeing someone who he's been after for four years…" Beat leaned forward on the couch, his weakness for angering the cops was being tempted.

Author's Note : *Yeah, yeah, I know. Not updated in a while but that's always the excuse. I've been hanging around Gaia for a while, so that took up some time and trying to beat Halo again also takes up time. Next chapter won't be very long, but it'll be updated faster. You'll also meet someone not so new to us, but this is the past remember? So there.*

Two Girls In Jail

Two Girls In Jail

The smell of stinking men and women, beer, and must greeted Gum as she walked timidly into the new surroundings. Never in her life had she been jailed before, and this seemed to be the end. By morning, she would be bound, gagged, shot, electrocuted, or vaccinated with poison. Whichever Hayashi's choice and with him behind it, she would probably suffer through all of them at once.

She was led to the last cellar at the end of a lonely walk that only had cells on the right side and the opposite was cement wall. The two officers pushed her against the wall, one unlocking her cuffs and the other opening the cell. Whatever they did, they couldn't let her get away. Not when their lives were on the line.

They threw her into the cell and she fell against the cold hard floor, cursing. "Get used to it, princess." said one of the officers, closing the door. The lock echoed throughout the jail, waking a few that were sleeping. Gum stood up, dusting herself off. "Of course…" she muttered, seeing nothing but a blank wall. They had given her the only cell without windows.

The only things in the cell were a sink, toilet, and bunk bed. She sighed, "Might as well lay the day away." She skated to the bottom bunk, only to find someone already there. Gum took up defense, but realized it was only another girl about the same age as her. Her blue eyes stood out in the darkness of the cell, showing her fear. She had short blue hair and a light blue dress. Gum couldn't find any shoes on her, but she had long striped socks that were also blue.

"Must be the new color code." muttered Gum, climbing to the top bunk. "So what are you in for?" she called out to the ceiling. The girl in the bunk below stood quiet, not sure what to do. "…uhm…s-shoplifting…a-and being a runaway…" she uttered softly. She answered in such a voice that Gum thought she was going to cry.

"You in for it tomorrow, too?"

"What do you mean?" the girl asked, pulling at her see through gloves. "You a rudie?" Gum questioned.

"Yes."

"Well if you didn't know, the police are killing them off. A stupid new law that's being put into act tomorrow." explained Gum as if she was talking about a detention. "They're not going to kill me." said the girl, shaking her head to no one. "Oh *really* ?" mocked Gum with an edgy voice. "And why not? Did you *apologize* ?"

"No…they're sending me back to my parents…"

Gum sat up, "What! You're parents! If they're sending you back to your parents, then you can't be a rudie." The girl came out from the bottom bunk and stood on her toes to see Gum, "No, I *am* a rudie! It's just…my parents paid Hayashi to find me and to not harm me." Gum rested her arms behind her head, "Well those are nice parents." she sneered. The girl glared at her, "Not really, they only want to marry me off to some guy so they can increase the family fortune!"

"So you have parents *and* you're rich." Gum said over, "And why do you wanna be a rudie for? Nothin the police are doin will ever bother *you* ." The girl shook her head, "It does bother me! And if your parents were trying to marry you to some guy who's old enough to be your grandfather, wouldn't you run away too?"

Gum gave this some consideration. She does have a point…she thought, nodding. "My parents only used me as a checkbook ever since I was born," the girl went on, "Baby modeling, girly pageants, teen queens…and I HAD to win. If not…well…" the girl rubbed her arm uncomfortably and sat back below on her bunk. Gum nodded at each count for what the other had to do in her past. *I guess she could pass off as a rudie…barely…* , thought Gum, removing her helmet.

Gum looked at her watch. It was now eight thirty. She turned over, facing the wall with an uneasy feeling in her stomach. She only had a few hours to live.

"And why are you here?" the voice popped up again. Gum turned her head, "Vandalism, stealing, all that good stuff."

"Any…"

"Parents? I don't know. Doubt I ever will. They abandoned me when I was practically born."

"Oh…"

Silence between the two bothered Gum. Time did pass while they talked, but it was the distraction that Gum wanted.

Beat looked at Yoyo's watch he was still wearing. It blinked eleven fifty. He went back to reading his magazines, or more, looking at the pictures, while Yoyo watched him. "Are we gonna go now?" he whined, wanting some action. Beat scowled at him, "If you wanna go and get caught, be my guest."

Yoyo sighed, "No, I don't wanna get caught…but…"

Beat glared at him, "But nothin! Stop annoying me and wait till I said we would leave, alright!" Yoyo leaned back against the couch, " *Fine* …"

Twenty minutes soon passed and they were off. "If something messes up, I'm blaming this whole thing on you." warned Beat, glancing at Yoyo. "Nothing's gonna happen, yo." Yoyo reassured, but inside, he wasn't so sure. He had never done anything like this before. And if he messed up, well, the cops knew him well already.

The two made a sharp turn that seemed to lead them into darkness. At the end, they could see a dim light that flickered every two minutes. The local jail.

Author's Note : *Not very long, but still an add in. So now we know who this girl is and we even meet a new one. Yes, I'm giving all of them backgrounds. Calm down.*

-So, will Yoyo and Beat be able to break this girl out of jail or will she become the new target for Hayashi's gun? Who exactly is this Rhyth girl, and will she have an affect on this story? (heheh, like I need to ask) Will the boys themselves get caught and blasted? Next chapter!-

Free

Free

Yoyo glanced around the empty street, "What makes you so sure she's in there?" "This is where they take captured rudies. What's the point in taking them three hours away to just get shot and killed the next day?" Beat shrugged, making his point. "Has anyone ever broken out of this jail?" asked Yoyo.

"Not that I know of." Beat admitted, "But no one's ever had help, either." Yoyo grinned, "Until now." Beat nodded, "Yeah, and you better hope she's not one of those martyr types. Then she'll be real pissed, and she'll take it out on you." Yoyo shook his head with a smile, "Trust me, yo. After that look on her face, I'm sure we're doing her a big favor."

Beat and Yoyo skated to the front, and climbed up the stairs, trying to be as quiet as possible. Beat leaned over, looking through one of the windows. Yoyo looked up, watching the three story building from his perspective. If he didn't know any better, he would've thought this was a museum. "Damn…it's late, we've got cages to check, and there's a party right at the door…" muttered Beat, thinking out loud.

"They're right there?" asked Yoyo, peeking in for himself. About five officers were standing not too far from the door, drinking coffee and eating take out. They all seemed happy over something. *Probably the capture* , thought Yoyo. He turned, "I guess we gotta…Beat?" He looked around, but Beat wasn't there.

"He ditched me!" Yoyo said in shock, almost in disbelief. Of all the places to leave me…, Yoyo thought, slowly backing away from the door.

"Yoyo!"

The boy turned his head both ways, "Beat? Where're ya, yo?"

"Over here! Shh!"

Yoyo followed the voice to the alleyway between the police station and another building, finding Beat. A relieved smile crossed Yoyo's face, "Almost thought you left me hangin there, yo." Beat arched an eyebrow in thought, "S'not a bad idea…"

Yoyo's facial expression went grim and Beat snickered, "Alright, there's a back door. We'll be able to sneak in, but under one condition." Yoyo shrugged, "And what's that?" Beat smiled evilly, "We'll need a distraction."

The cheap and used bed squeaked as Gum turned over for the hundredth time, trying to sleep, but failing miserably. This was not how a rudie was supposed to go down. They were expected to die with the honor of trying to help the people of their home, to cry freedom and keep peace, but Gum couldn't help but feel jittery over her oncoming execution. The girl below her, she had learned her name was Rhyth, was sleeping soundly on her own bunk, having nothing to worry about except a lame future with an old man.

Gum thought over her life, not that there was much she could be proud of, but stressing out Hayashi was a reward in itself. Her watched ticked twelve thirty. Kill offs were at five. Hayashi had reminded her in the car. A couple of hours and she was gone from this world. A loud bang woke Gum out of her daze and woke Rhyth from her dream, "What happened!" she mumbled.

"I have no idea…" answered Gum, jumping off her bunk and skating to the barred door. She couldn't see anything, but she prayed that whatever it was would delay her time.

In the front, Yoyo rubbed his head from his ram. "We'll need a distraction!" he said, imitating Beat's orders, "Yeah, the only thing that'll make a loud enough sound is your head…" he growled, shaking off the headache. The door was being unlocked. "Yipe!" he hissed, jumping the side of the steps and racing into the alleyway. "Who's there?" called out a deep voice, possibly angry that whoever did the noise wasn't there.

"Stupid kids and their pranks!" Yoyo heard the man mutter. The door

clicked and Yoyo peeked out. He climbed up the steps and closed his eyes as she rammed his shoulder into the door, creating a louder thud that echoed throughout the jail. He jumped before the cop could even get to the door, and quickly enough too. This time the man came out with a gun, "Show yourself! You're messing with the police you little dunce!"

Yoyo grinned as the man shot a fire into the air. Another officer joined him, "What's going on?"

"Some stupid kid is annoying me. Where are parents anymore?"

Yoyo screeched the loudest he could, throwing small rocks from the gravel of the sidewalk at the cops, but shooting them into the air so it seemed that they were falling from the sky. "What the hell!" screamed the officer. "That's it! I'm taking them down!" he called to the other, and the other joined him.

They walked around as Yoyo slinked away, to the back of the jailhouse where Beat told him to enter, pulling his hood up. He silently lifted the latch and snuck in, seeing that all the officers were in the front, looking out the door at the other two who were looking for someone who wasn't there.

Beat smiled as he heard Yoyo's antics downstairs. The third distraction let Beat know Yoyo was going to come in and help, so Beat looked around on the floor that he was on, but only found sleeping criminals and a mummified rudie. He quickly passed by his cell, knowing that jerk would give him away. He was in a gang known as the Immortals, and they had no pity on anyone. Not even their own members.

"Hey, any of you seen a dude 'bout this tall, red hair, goggles, and some whacked out headphones?" asked Yoyo weakly, receiving glares from the captives. Why should they help someone who wasn't going to help them? "This is the wrong place to be askin for help, small fry." answered a female voice. Yoyo tilted his head to see the girl talking. She was lying out on the bottom bunk with her arms behind her head and a knee brought up. For being in jail, she looked very comfortable.

She had her blue hair tied into two pigtails and was dressed as if she was going to a night club. Her skates were sloppily thrown to the side, as if she were resting at home. "What are you doing on the outside of a cell?" she sneered, lifting her head a little. "I…uhh…I'm looking for my friend…" he said, inching away from her cell.

"There *are* no friends in the *real* world." she answered him, resting her head back. "Sooner or later they'll let you down, and then you're screwed."

Yoyo stuck his hands in his pockets and couldn't help but feel sorry for the girl. *No* , he thought, *you're already getting yourself into deep crap for one girl* . "Shut up, you whore!" grumbled a familiar voice from the next cell over. Yoyo leaned to the side, seeing the half reptilian boy, known as a Poison Jam member, sticking his ugly face between the bars.

"What did you call me!" the girl screeched, shooting up from the bed. As the two were too occupied to eventually tire of Yoyo and call the cops over, Yoyo slinked away to the next floor softly calling out for Beat.

He looked around, walking slowly, "Beat? C'mon, yo! This is the last place I wanna get caught in!"

"Then I suggest you start moving!" said a raspy voice.

Yoyo jumped with a squeak, "YO!"

Beat couldn't stop himself from laughing. He had to cover his mouth to muffle it. "That ain't funny, yo! This place is runnin my blood pressure!" growled Yoyo. Beat nodded, "Yeah, well I had to dodge three cops, and it wasn't easy."

"You find her?"

"Not yet, but I checked the top floor and she's not there."

"She ain't on the bottom floor, yo."

"Then she's here. C'mon, I wanna see that bastard's face fire up when he sees she's gone." smiled Beat, leading on the search. Yoyo

nodded and looked around. This floor only had one long hallway, and it was cold, drafty, and windowless. "Um, you first?"

Beat pushed him forward, "This won't be long, check them and be quiet." Yoyo walked on, grumbling about doing all the work as he crossed his arms.

At the end cell, Gum tilted her head to the bars, listening. She could hear people talking. They were males, but they didn't sound like cops…

She climbed down her bunk to find Rhyth hiding beneath her covers. "I hope it's not my parents…" she said with worried eyes. Gum rolled her eyes and went to the bars to find herself face to face with a green haired boy. She screamed in surprise and he jumped back, startled, "GAH!"

Beat heard the reply and began to walk to the end. "I think he found her."

"Who the hell are you!" she asked, trying to maintain her cool.

"The guys who're breaking you out." answered Beat, walking up to the cell. Gum's heart fluttered out of excitement. Maybe this wasn't her end after all. The two strangers looked at the barred door, the hit finally occurring to them that they needed something. Yoyo grinned at Beat sheepishly, "Did you happen to get the keys, yo?"

Beat bit his lip, "No…I'll have to get them. Yoyo, you stay here and keep her quiet." Before Yoyo could protest, Beat was gone.

"Wow…so I have rescuers… what's the occasion?" asked Gum, leaning against the bars. "Different reasons." Yoyo answered, keeping lookout. "Sides, you'd be as good as dead 'cause of that new law." he added. Gum silently nodded, knowing this was too true. Why were they helping her, though? It didn't make any sense, but as long as she had a chance to live, she would do anything.

Gum tilted her head, watching Yoyo. He looked like he was trying so hard to be good at his job. "I've never seen you before." Gum caught herself saying. He smiled weakly, turning pink, "Well, I'm kinda new,

yo. Just startin' out." She thought about her first days as a rudie. It was something she would never regret.

"It's a big change from what most people are used to. Is that why you two are here? You're still too soft then." she lectured, shaking her head. "I'm new to the streets. He's not." Yoyo shook his head, crossing his arms and leaning against the cold wall. A small clinking sounded echoed throughout the hallway until Beat reached the cell. "We gotta hurry, I think one of them saw me." he hissed, jamming the key into the lock. The door clicked and he slid the door, "Simple enough. Hurry up and get out!"

Gum walked out with a lifted heart, and watched as Beat was about to close the gate. Rhyth peeked out from the covers, finally realizing what was going on. "Hey, don't leave me here!" she squeaked, jumping out of the bed. Beat stared at her, "Uhh…?" She reached under her bed, pulling out two blue skates and strapped them on quickly, "I wanna go, too!"

Beat sighed and let her out, "I dunno…this is already lookin' impossible…" He waited for Yoyo to add his usual reply, but he didn't receive one. Looking over his shoulder while quietly closing the gate, he realized that Yoyo was too occupied staring at the other girl with an awkward gaze to do anything else. "Yoyo?"

Yoyo's eyes didn't move, "Hmm?"

Beat patted his shoulder, "Have a little respect."

Yoyo flushed, "I-I w-wasn't…"

The girl tilted her head at Yoyo and he glared at Beat.

A loud thud interrupted the conversation. "Can we help you?" asked an icy voice. Two officers walked towards them, charging their guns. "No, we were just leaving." said Beat, motioning the others to gather around. "I don't think so." smirked one of the cops, soon down on the floor as Beat did a dash into him and the other, knocking them both down. He kicked away their guns for the moment, "GO!"

The three standing raced off down the hallway, and ended up

separating at the end. Beat caught up, trudging down the stairs, "Where'd they all go!" At the words, the three suddenly zoomed out of nowhere, crashing into each other. "We gotta get outta here! These guys are all over the place, yo!" yelled Yoyo, getting up. Beat pointed, "The door's right there, move it!"

Two police officers stood in their way, though. They smiled as the four clumped together as if to shield themselves with each other. One's smile soon faded, "They have the girl with them!"

Beat rolled his eyes, *no duh* , he thought, but apprehended that they were talking about the blue haired girl. She ducked behind Yoyo, trying to hide. The officers lowered their guns slightly, and Beat smirked, an idea forming in his head. He reached for Rhyth's arm and snagged her to the front, holding her in a headlock, "This girl?" he teased, worrying the cops.

"If you don't want nothin bad happenin to the girl, you'll put your guns down, nice and easy…" he ordered, inching closer to the door, still holding Rhyth. Yoyo was glaring at him darkly, but Gum understood his plan and knew why the police were getting nervous. The cops did as told, "Don't do anything stupid, boy!" they warned, but knew they had no chance. Rhyth, who was completely startled by the entire thing, was pale and believed that Beat was going to actually hurt her.

Gum opened the door, and Yoyo followed, with Beat and Rhyth right after, still holding hostage-like. Beat could feel Rhyth trembling, "Calm down, I'm not gonna do nothin to ya." he hissed, letting her go as soon as they hit the street. A few bullets pelted around the teens, but soon stopped with shouts of, "They have the girl with them!"

They soon hit Shibuya Terminal, when they began to hear sirens. "Aw *shit* !" cursed Beat, increasing his speed. He sped around a couple of difficult turns, with Yoyo right behind him. They needed to get back to the apartment quick. Entering Dogenzaka Hill, Beat passed the familiar stores, streets, and alleyways until he saw his home street. Beat reached into his pocket while he sped down the street, wrenching into his alley.

Sticking the key into the hole and pushing his door open, he bolted

inside, hearing the sirens fade away. He still needed to hide, cops had a thing for popping up at the wrong times. He turned, "Yoyo? What's…oh NO!" With Yoyo came the two girls that they had freed from the jail. "No, no, no! We did the good thing, now get outta here! You can't stay!" he yelled, holding the door open.

Yoyo glared at him, "You can't just throw them out! The cops'll get 'em again, yo! What would've been the point in going!" Beat clenched his teeth, " *Yoyo* !" Gum pressed the door closed quickly, "I hear them coming this way!" At her words, the ringing music busted through the street, warning everyone that there was a hunt. Beat glanced at the blue girl who was so pale she was about to pass out, "Why are they after you so bad?"

"It's not that they're after me, it's that my parents paid them to keep me safe until they came by…" she explained, staring at the floor with her arms behind her. "Money-hungry bastards…" Beat mumbled, locking the door tight. He pulled on the blinds, closing them and put his finger to his lips. Car doors slammed outside and there were light murmurs of talking from the officers. Gum quickly removed her skates, and the others copied. Whatever they could do that would make them less noticeable, the better.

The voices grew louder until they were right in front of the door. Beat slid behind the couch, where Yoyo was, and the girls followed, hiding behind them. Flashlight circles blinked in the window, trailing around the room, but the police couldn't see anything because of the closed blinds. They knocked on the door, and the four teens held their breaths. They sat with their backs against the bigger couch in case one of the officers could actually see a bit through the windows. Scrunched together, they shared the same heartbeat and breathing pattern, which was now put into a pause.

Turning the knob, the officer realized the door was locked, and that someone lived there. "Forget it, it's late, and everyone in town's asleep." The other answered back angrily, "That idiot whacked me with a freakin' rock in the back of my head that's gonna give me a migraine for weeks! Not to mention the little devil broke out two important captives. Hayashi's going to kill us!" he said, the anger in his voice switching to fear. Their conversation trailed off as they went back into their car and set their siren on again, driving off.

Beat crawled over to window and peeked through the corner of the shade, nodding his head slowly, "I think they're all gone…" He flicked on the lights and sighed as the rest stood up. "Talk about gaining experience, yo." Yoyo grinned, throwing himself on the small couch. Beat rolled his eyes, "I should *kill* you for about a hundred things right now!" he growled, hands clenching into fists.

"What did I do?"

"What didn't you do!" snarled Beat, walking up to him. "First, you lead me into this whole idea to get her out!" he said, throwing and angry point at Gum, "Then, I'm out at midnight trying to get TWO out, besides *you* and it's all going wrong! AND you bring them both here! Two problems with that, we're all wanted, *and* I don't have room for them!" he exploded with Yoyo shrinking into his hood. He peeked out at Beat from just above his nose, the lower half of his face buried into his hood and his body sinking into the couch. "We couldn't just leave them there, yo…"

Beat tugged at his hair, "Uh, DUH, it's the point of being on the street! If you got no home, got no friends, then you're ALONE and on your OWN!" Yoyo ignored Beat for a minute, trying to realize his faults. Gum, on the other hand, shook her head and crossed her arms. The redhead was beating down on the short guy, and he was new. She glanced at Rhyth, who was watching him, too, with a guilty look in her eyes.

Yoyo stared at the floor and said nothing. Beat left him and went to his cooler, pulling out a can of beer to calm himself down. He removed his goggles and headphones, running his fingers into his scalp over and over. Gum looked at him from over the counter and tried not to stare. He looked more innocent than the way he acted. In her judgment, he was also cute, but she kept that to herself. She couldn't let anything distract her from her regular life, but boys were one of the things on her mental checklist she hadn't covered yet when she was in jail. Not that she had never flirted before or had a boyfriend, but she never had a *steady* boyfriend. She always found something in them that would turn her completely away from them to someone who didn't include that feature.

She sat down on the big couch, removing her helmet. She pushed

the thought of Beat away. She didn't even know him, and he was pretty nasty, but then again she could be that way, too. Rhyth was still standing behind the couch, wearing the same expression. Oddly enough, she felt this whole lecture was entirely her fault and that they were in trouble because of her. She also felt bad for the boy sitting alone who had been staring at the floor for more than five minutes now. The other boy was still stressing, opening another beer.

"Don't get drunk." warned Gum, placing her helmet by her skates. She was too lazy to remove her socks, so she stretched her toes in them, cracking them with each moment. Rhyth finally moved from her position, cringing at every crack. Beat glared at the girl from his place, "I'll do whatever I feel like. It's *my* home."

"Well I'm staying the night and I don't want any surprises when I get up. Don't expect anyone to take care of you if you decide to give yourself a hangover." she sneered, resting her head against the couch. "And who said anyone could stay the night?" growled Beat, getting up. A short silence filled the almost empty room. "He did." Gum said, pointing at Yoyo who was shaking his head hurriedly. He ran his hand over his face and sighed. Beat threw him a deadly glare and Yoyo sighed again.

"All of you out, you too." he said flatly at Yoyo. Yoyo's eyes widened, "Wait, no! But, you can't-" Beat spun around, grabbing Yoyo by the hood, "Oh can't I?"

Yoyo glared at him through his shades, "We had a deal." "Well I just broke it." Beat responded, dragging him to the door. Yoyo scowled at him with rage, "Fine! Now that I know where the real jail is to get rudies into, I'll just let them know that I found the one that broke the two girls out!"

Beat shook him, "And you'll be handing yourself in with me if you do."

"Not exactly," he added, pulling his hood down and taking off his shades, "With minor adjustments and different change of clothes, they won't even recognize me, yo." Gum held back a laugh as Beat's eyes glowed with fire, wanting to tear Yoyo apart. For being a noob,

she thought, he's pretty slick. Rhyth was chewing a nail, twitching every time Beat moved. *He's dangerous* , she thought, *better watch out for him* . In her big heart she prayed that she wouldn't have to leave. She really needed a place to hide, and this was the perfect hideout. Her parents would never think to check in the slums. Beat let go of Yoyo, and he fell to the floor, "One night." was all he said before locking himself into the bathroom. The only sound after that was the shower being turned on and the breathing of the three left.

Author's Note: Maybe a bit longer than the last chapter. (shrugs) Well, now they're all hanging out at Beat's place, but hey, could you blame him? Who wants total strangers all up in your house? Not me for starters…

- *With the police after them, Beat and Yoyo have managed to break out these two girls, but are they trustworthy? Yoyo seems to think so, but Beat is utterly furious at the scam going on without his input. And what about that shy one...? It's always the quiet ones…* -

Friendly Bonding

Friendly Bonding

Yoyo adjusted his hood in the front from being pulled on, and closed the door, leaning on it as soon as it was closed. He slid down to his butt, scratching his head awkwardly. "Uhm…sorry 'bout the…" he jerked his head to the door across from him, the bathroom. Gum nodded, "Did we just catch him on a bad day or is he always a prick?"

Yoyo's expression answered her question. "I wouldn't say he's a *prick* …" he trailed off, trying to think of an appropriate word, but couldn't think of any. "Asshole, dick, bitchy…" Gum offered, noticing the magazines and rolling her eyes. "Jerk?" she said finally, quoting the word with her fingers. Yoyo glanced at Gum, "Honestly, he's all, but I wouldn't exactly announce that, yo." he whispered with a smile.

Gum smiled. *So humor got him through life* , she thought, *it's a good tool* . "I'm not much for introductions." admitted Gum, "I usually leave my mark when I've beaten someone, but, I'm Gum." Yoyo nodded, "Yoyo." Gum glanced back at Rhyth who didn't want to ruin the conversation. "Are you gonna stand the whole time?" she asked, resting her head on the back again. Rhyth gave her a weak smile and stood put, "I don't exactly feel welcome…"

Yoyo grinned, "Don't worry about Beat, yo. Make yourself at home." Rhyth sat timidly on the smaller sofa and looked at her hands. "Relax," he offered, "He's not gonna change. He's been that way since I ran into him." Gum shook her head, "Shame. How long've you known him for? You seem like opposites."

"Um, two days?" Yoyo shrugged, stretching out on the floor. "No wonder you have patience with that." Gum smiled, resting her feet on the couch as well. She rested her head against the arm rest. "You guys just met him. He makes a really bad first impression, but he gets his normal moments. I mean he laughs and smiles…" Yoyo shrugged, "So I take that as normal."

Gum propped her head up with her hand, "Yoyo, you sound like a nice kid, why are you out here? Don't you have a home?"

Yoyo shook his head, "No…that's why I'm bunkin with Beat here. We're both against cops. They're worthless assholes ever since Rokkaku replaced the good ones." he said, and Gum agreed. "My things were given away when my parents…" he paused, and decided to leave the sentence hanging. Rhyth listened from her spot on the couch, and she could've sworn she saw a tear in his eye.

Feeling the eyes watching him, he peeked up and caught Rhyth. He blushed and looked away, rubbing his neck awkwardly. The last thing he needed was a cute girl thinking he was a wimp. His embarrassed feeling traveled to Rhyth and she looked down at her hands instead. "Did…the cops not help?" asked Gum softly, seeing that this was a personal issue with him. He nodded quietly and sat up. He took a deep breath, "Car crash…my parents had a chance to live…but by the time the cops actually believed me…it was too late…"

Yoyo suddenly felt relieved again, as he had before when he told Beat. Even though the memory brought him pain, it also released it. "So…you're an orphan like that. I could only imagine how that must've been like...to have parents and then lose them…" Gum nodded, "I have a friend who was in that position. I was trying to look for him when Poison Jam came and messed up everything. He's probably wondering what happened to me…" she wondered off into thought. "Your friend a rudie, too?" asked Yoyo, tilting his head to the side. Gum nodded, "Yeah, he knows this place that's big enough for a headquarters for a gang."

"Is he starting one?" Yoyo investigated with deep curiosity. Gum nodded, "Yeah, and I was supposed to meet him yesterday, but the news of me gettin jailed must've reached him by now. He probably thinks I'm dead." Yoyo planned on asking her if he would have a chance to be in this new gang, but his nerves got to him. He just repeated the information in his head until he memorized it, but he didn't need to repeat for long to get *that* kind of info stuck in his mind. He felt excited, but he held it in. He couldn't let *his* impression be bad.

A small yawn startled him, it coming from the smaller couch. He had almost forgotten about the other girl in his excitement. He tried of thinking of something to say, but he couldn't think of anything with her staring at him like that. "Uhm…eheheh…" He only managed to blush even darker than the last. For some reason, he couldn't say anything to her. At that moment, the bathroom door opened and Beat came out with his shirt tossed over his shoulder.

Gum sat up and got up, heading over to the bathroom. She closed the door and the water was heard once again. Beat pulled out his blanket and laid down on the couch. Having a feeling he was still in a bad mood, Yoyo stayed quiet and so did Rhyth. Rhyth moved over on the couch and made room for Yoyo, in case he wanted to sit. Taking the offer, he climbed on the couch and curled up on his cushion. He rested his head on his arm, but quickly turned his head and poked her arm. She looked at him curiously. His cheeks reddened, "I-I never got your name…" he said shyly.

She gave him a small smile, "Its Rhyth."

Some time passed and all that was heard was Beat's even breathing and the shower going off.

"Hey Rhyth?"

"Hm?"

"Why were you in jail, but not sentenced to death? What was with the parents thing?"

Rhyth rubbed her elbow, "My parents paid the police for my safety if I was to ever get caught by myself." Yoyo arched an eyebrow, "They arrested you for that?" "Well…" she said, turning a little pink, "I didn't exactly want to go…so by the time they got me to the jail they were tired of putting up with me…"

"A fight all the way." Yoyo smiled, placing his hands behind his head. He sighed as he thought about what each person did who was staying in that same apartment tonight. Each one was doing something worth awing over, and he…nothing. He knew starting out was usually lonely, but he had new friends with pasts. His past was

basically empty. Yoyo blinked, something hitting him. "Wait…you're running away from your parents!"

The sudden loudness startled Beat out of his sleep, but he mumbled and turned over, soon falling into his dream world again. Rhyth nodded and his expression went into deep confusion, "But…but why would you do that? I'd give anything to have my parents back…" He couldn't understand why anyone would want to give up their parents. The words seemed so foreign to him. Rhyth shook her head, "Your parents may have been great, but mine aren't. They use me for their profit…and I have no life." she admitted, her face paling. "They don't care how I feel, they don't care what I do, as long as it doesn't mess up their money, and the sad thing is…I feel more comfortable telling a stranger this than telling my parents." she finished, glancing at Yoyo.

"I wish I was in your situation, Yoyo. To have had a great life with my parents and at least have memories that kept me going than to have the ones I do now who love their money more than me."

Yoyo looked at the floor as he always did when he had nothing to say. "But…they're taking care of you…" he said quietly, "Giving you a home, food, schooling…"

"I also was alone, forced to do things I never wanted to do, and friendless." Rhyth counted off her fingers. Yoyo's expression saddened at these words. He knew how that felt. "But I guess that's changing?" she said hopefully with a smile. Yoyo nodded. No one was there to force her to do anything, and she definitely had friends. Alone? He wasn't sure. It depended on the person.

"So you ran away because your parents don't care for you that much?" he asked, trying to get this right. "Oh, no. They love anything or anyone that gets them money, it's just…" she rubbed her arm, embarrassed. "What?" he asked, now waiting for an answer. He couldn't be left hanging. He leaned closer, tilting his head. She rubbed her hands together and sat on them, shaking her head.

"What are you hiding, yo?" he asked with a sly smile now, wanting to know what she was doing. "Nothing!" she said, shaking her head, "It's nothing! Like you said, they don't care." "No there's more, ain't

there?" he pressured, pulling at her arm. She moved away, but he moved with her, trying to get her hands into view. "Let me go!" she said, pushing him away.

He did as told, and blushed. She looked away, "I'm sorry…" He smiled, still red in face, "It's okay, yo. I'm kinda nosey when it comes to secrets."

This had been so easy when she told Gum, why couldn't she tell Yoyo? She slowly raised her hand and let him see it. He took her hand and saw that she had a ring on it. An *engagement* ring. "Y-you're getting married!" he said in such a soft voice she could just hear it. She nodded slowly, her stomach feeling queasy. To him this was a big deal. To her, it had always been her future.

"I got this for my last birthday…I'm supposed to get married in the winter." she explained, removing the ring and looking at it herself. Yoyo had inched away quickly, feeling quite embarrassed with himself. He had no idea she was actually *taken* . And when he thought taken, he meant she was really someone else's.

"You should probably get back home." he said quietly, "You've got someone waiting for you." She watched him carefully, "No. I'm not going back. You two saved me from that." she said pointing at him and Beat. "I was given this load since I was born, and I'm not about to marry a sixty five year old when I'm sixteen." she announced.

" *Sixty five* !" Yoyo repeated, falling over.

"He paid for everything. The wedding, the rings, house, support…" she said grimly.

Yoyo peeked out at her from behind the armrest on the other side, "I never did *anything* to you!"

Rhyth turned, "Huh?"

Yoyo stood up a little more, "He won't…hunt me down? Will he?" Rhyth giggled, "No! He's hunting *me* down! But I won't let him find me. Or my parents. They'll have no clue I'm here. …why would he hunt you down?" she added curiously. He shook his head and

waved his hands, "You never know, yo! Adults think the worst possible things! Some kill for looking at someone the wrong way! I just didn't know you were taken!" he defended, sitting back on the couch.

"I'm *not* taken!" she argued, pointing at him. "I just said I'm not gonna marry a sixty five year old guy! I don't love him or anything. Actually…" she said with thought, "I've never even seen him, which I think is a lot worse…" Yoyo looked at her worriedly, "It could be anyone! Does he know what you look like?" Rhyth nodded, "By pictures…"

"Okay, you know by hanging with us, you're puttin me and Beat into danger zones right?"

Rhyth shook her head, "Don't worry about him. He's not getting his 'future bride to be'. I'm making sure of it!" she said, tossing the ring. The door to the bathroom finally opened and Gum stepped out with a smile, "Much better." She walked over to the couch Beat was on and pushed his feet away so she had room to sit. She made herself comfortable and leaned her head on the back of the couch.

"Did you know she's getting married?" asked Yoyo, pointing at Rhyth. Rhyth rolled her eyes, "I *was* getting married, Yoyo! WAS!" Gum nodded, "Yeah, but she doesn't want an old wrinkly dude for a husband. She's free for any willing bachelor to snag her up, *Yoyo* ."

Rhyth's cheeks flared pink as Yoyo's went blood red, "That was cold, yo." He didn't say anything after that. He couldn't even if he tried.

Author's Note: Now you know just a little more about Rhyth. Long wait and yadda…sorry, homework, studying, and reading other fics and books. It's healthy!

- It was a close call for our heroes, but one seems to be ticked off from his sidekick's actions. Will the girls ever truly feel at home or will Beat's temper get the best of them all? And what about back at the jail? I'm sure ***someone's*** *not to happy about that breakout… -*

Captain Hayashi

Captain Hayashi

Author's Note: *Strong language for those wanting a warning. Oh, and I made Beat's personality jerk-like because it fits into the story and you'll see why later on. Thank you.*

Morning was quiet, dull and dreary, and added with the heat of the summer day, it was almost unbearable, but inside the office of Captain Hayashi, it was cool and shady as the air conditioning blew an icy breeze into the room, making a slight humming sound that echoed throughout the office. Only one person was permitted to enter, and that was the captain himself.

Not that anyone with common sense would want to enter the dark and gloomy room. Air conditioning was the only thing that would lure someone to the door, but as soon as they would peek in, what they saw would drive them away. In the corner of the room was a small square table with a chair next to it, attached with wires, connecting the two. Resting on the table was a small machine made of metal with a screen on top. The chair faced the back of this contraption, the victim unable to see the consequences of their stories. No one whoever sat in that chair ever came out of the building.

Near the captain's desk were three cabinets. One was for criminals that were on the loose, the second was for the check ins for prison, and the third was his personal filing of those who had been executed by him. Already in that cabinet he had three drawers filled with pictures, identifications, but most of all a large red stamp that said 'COMPLETED'. To Captain Hayashi, this meant the criminal completed their life already, thanks to him. Framed behind his desk was a declaration for the new law, allowing him to take down the rudies of Tokyo as brutally as he wished. It was like handing him Christmas early. Mounted on his walls were all types of guns: sniper guns, grenade launchers, bazookas, and even confiscated guns

from past criminals.

It was because of his weird keepsakes and habits that made his co-workers a little anxious of him. He loved his own gun more than life itself and he cleaned it everyday, talked to it, and packed it away lovingly as if it were a child. No one could ever guess what the man was thinking, and no one would want to try. At the moment, he was ironically humming 'When the Saints Come Marching In' while reading the newspaper, sitting in his swivel chair. His eyes scanned over headlines such as, ' **More Delinquents Captured By Captain Hayashi Ugusama, Commander of Division O** ' and ' **Are the Rulings For Street Juveniles Too Harsh?** '.

He chuckled to himself. Only a supporter of those stupid hooligans would dare to post something like that in the newspaper. He stopped humming as his eyes wandered over a medium sized picture of the girl he caught the day before. A malicious grin spread across his face as excitement for the morning's event over took him. "I've been waiting a long time, little girl…" he hissed, flipping the page and the story changed to a sixteen year old runaway from Mikyanu Orphanage. Hayashi stared at the teen and studied him.

From what the grays and blacks could show in a paper, he could tell the boy had light hair and dark eyes, but a troublemaking grin. "Looks like he's a dirtbag type." the captain mumbled, grunting. A disturbing ring echoed throughout the room, and Hayashi reached for the receiver of the phone while his attention was still on the paper. He lifted it to his ear and spoke, "Shibuya Law Enforcement Unit." he commented boredly.

" *Captain Hayashi, we have a complaint on the other line and they wish to speak directly to you.* "

"Who are they?"

" *The Tuksori Family.* "

Hayashi put his paper to the side and opened his desk drawer, pulling out a small notepad and picked a pen from a mug he had on his desk, "Transfer the call." A light beep screeched in the captain's ear and he repeated his greeting, "Shibuya Law Enforcement Unit,

Captain Hayashi speaking."

" *Good morning, Captain.* " greeted an older man's voice in a dark serious tone.

"Good morning, sir, how can I help you today?" Hayashi sighed, making a note to buy a bagel or something for his hunger.

" *My wife and I were informed yesterday around noon that our daughter was found and she was being held safely in the captivity of the Dogenzaka Prison. Now, due to some private matters we were not able to retrieve her until this morning, but we called in to make sure we were going to the correct reformatory.* "

Hayashi nodded to no one, "Yes, your daughter is perfectly safe and yes, it is the Dogenzaka Prison. She is being heavily guarded, so there should be no fret about that."

" *Oh really? Because right now, I'm calling from the outside of the prison and your guards are telling me that last night she* ***broke out and cannot be found!*** "

Hayashi sat up from his leaned back position and adjusted his jaw, "Are you sure you're at the right prison, sir? We have three located in Dogenzaka."

" *Yes, I'm at the right one! They have her profile and picture on a clipboard here! Now you listen to me, Captain. If you don't have my daughter found in less than three days, I will personally see to it that your ass gets thrown in hell! I did NOT pay for her to be babysat for a few hours! I anticipated you to do your job! I expect her to be guarded under the utmost protection for the amount I offered! She's entered in the Tokyo Modeling Pageant for next week and is to be married in a few months! I will stop by in three days, Captain. Do not inform me if you find her earlier than that. Just have her when I come.* "

Hayashi clenched his teeth with disgust as the line clicked and dial tone beeped in his ear. "Fucking asshole…" he growled under his breath, slamming the receiver. "Bitching about shit I could care less about. As long as the idiot paid his fee, there's no reason for a rush.

I'm the captain of my division, if the bastard wants my job, he can rip my badge off of me when he can deprive me of my fucking bloody gun!"

The captain glared at the phone that had just rang once more and picked it up, ripping it out of its place and tearing the cord out from the wall, throwing it directly at a mirror he had across from his desk, shattering it in a million tiny pieces. He sighed with a smile, feeling a little better. "But nothing will make me feel as great as getting rid of you…" he sang insanely, walking over to the second cabinet and pulling out Gum's file.

He lazily reached for Rhyth's file and sat at his desk, completely ignoring the dangerous mess on his floor. "Why didn't those idiots tell me about that stupid rich girl?" he muttered, writing himself a note to get on that case. "They're hiring fools nowadays…" He opened Gum's file, filling out some information that only the captain was allowed to sign off. He glanced at where she was staying. It was Dogenzaka Prison, cell five eighty-two.

He nodded as he signed off his signature for her execution. "Wonderful!" he grinned happily, "The little slut deserves this one." He glanced at Rhyth's file, filling out minor guardian promises on his behalf. He grabbed her release card and wrote his name on it, her name, and her cell number. He momentarily froze as he saw her cell's number and Gum's cell number.

He screamed in frustration as he threw back his chair and slapped the files across the room, pulling on his hair. "Who the hell assigned them the SAME cell!" he fumed, his blood pressure rising. A light knock interrupted his fit, "Sir?"

Hayashi glared at the young man, " *What!* " he hissed. "I-I was told to ask i-if y-you were interested in c-coffee before the morning executions?" the officer asked nervously, noticing the room straight away. Everyone knew Hayashi was dangerous when he was angry. "No, you idiot! Get OUT!"

"Yes sir!"

The door slammed shut, forcing the framed law behind Hayashi's

desk to tilt off its nail and fall, shattering the glass all over his desk and overturned chair. Hayashi took a deep breath and clenched his teeth, reaching for his cell phone which was kept clipped to his pants. Dialing quickly, he sniffed, pacing back and forth, "Yes? Hello? I want to speak with Sergeant Natsumo!"

" *C-captain Hayashi! Of course sir, right away sir!* "

The officer gulped as he passed the phone to his commander. "It's the Captain."

The Sergeant took the receiver shakily and straightened out his voice the best he could, " *Sergeant Natsumo here, sir.* "

"Who was placed in cell five eighty-two!"

" *Uhh-I-uhm…t-the girl you brought in yesterday and the Tuksori girl…* "

"I just received a call that one of them broke out last night. Am I to assume they both got away!"

" *Y-yes sir! Two males, seemingly other rudies, managed to break them out around twelve twenty four last night.* "

Hayashi stopped his pacing and his face became emotionless, "There was a break *in* ?"

" *Y-yes sir…* "

Hayashi rubbed his chin, "That girl, Gum, had an appointment for an execution this morning, Sergeant. If she isn't found by five, which is in about fifteen minutes, you'll be taking her place. And I want full descriptions of the two that broke them out immediately!"

The Sergeant nodded and sighed dejectedly, " *Yes, sir, right away…* "

Hayashi snapped his cell phone shut and smiled, opening his door, "My office needs its weekly clean up!" His good mood would be only temporary, but then again, Hayashi always got his way.

A Mini Unofficial Gang

A Mini Unofficial Gang

The dark, cool apartment sheltered the four tired teenagers from the disgusting heat outside. It was pathetic how melting hot it was outside. One could actually use the phrase, "It's so hot you could fry an egg on the sidewalk." If you weren't prepared for the scorch outside, you were very liable for heat stroke.

But inside the apartment, the redheaded teen was wrapped up with his usual blanket, halfway falling off his side of the couch as the girl across from him sharing the same sofa was sitting with her arms crossed, her legs stretched out and crossed at her ankles, and her head hanging painfully. On the other couch, Yoyo, the newest boy to the streets, was curled up with his face nuzzled into his hood and his sunglasses on the floor while the blue haired girl, Rhyth, was slouching to his right with her arms crossed on the armrest and her head resting peacefully on top of them.

All were lost in a land far away from any police, parents, or authority that could overrule them. That is, until Gum's watch went off. The beep went off like an alarm clock, waking everyone in the room. Beat rolled over and fell with a thud and groaned as Yoyo jumped and cried, "I didn't take it, I swear!" Rhyth's eyes shot open and she tensed up, heart racing, while Gum just switched the alarm off and yawned.

"What the hell…" mumbled Beat, thinking that everything, the stress, the adventure, and the rescue had just been some crazy dream he had. "Good morning to you too, Mr. Grumpy." smirked Gum, cracking her neck. Beat stood up grimly and picked up his blanket, only wishing it *had* been a dream. Yoyo blinked and smiled drunkenly, still half asleep, "Its mor-ning already?" he asked between a yawn. Gum glanced at her watch, "Five in the morning to be exact."

Yoyo glanced at the shades, "It's still dark outside…"

"The sun doesn't show until six thirty, Yoyo."

"Oh…cool…yo…" he mumbled, drifting off into sleep again. Beat gave him a tired, bothered look, and threw himself on the couch, immediately falling asleep. Gum arched an eyebrow and shook her head with a small smile. ' *Boys could be so weird…* ' she thought, glancing at Rhyth and realizing she was awake. Gum stared at the door dazed for a while until she spoke, "Sorry about that joke last night. I was aiming it more at Yoyo than you."

Rhyth tilted her head, "Oh…don't worry about that…" she answered, peeking at Yoyo for the moment. "I noticed it bothered you a little. I only said it because he was givin' you 'the look' ever since we broke out of jail." explained Gum sleepily. Rhyth shifted herself on the cushion, stretching her arms that had fallen asleep. "What look?" she asked innocently. Gum looked at her strangely. She glanced at the floor, " *Is this girl* ***that*** *deprived?* " she wondered.

Gum leaned her head on the back of the couch, "You *know* …that look all guys get when they're attracted to girls. He has his eye out for you." she added, pointing to Yoyo lazily as he turned over on his back. Rhyth stared at Yoyo, feeling embarrassed. Rhyth had only liked a boy once, and it was when she was much younger. But then he had grown to be a jerk and her liking for him evaporated as soon as he started to pick on her. Other boys had come to like her, but it was only because she would be forced to wear things like bikinis and certain underwear for fashion shows, and their minds were only set to one thing.

But as she thought about how kind Yoyo was the day before and how caring he seemed, she couldn't help but feel happy that she at least had a good start with him as friends. Her cheeks filled in pink and Gum smiled, leaning on her arm, "What are *you* thinking about?" she teased. Rhyth blushed a shade darker, "N-nothing!"

Gum let out a small chuckle as she made herself comfortable and snuggled in, "Sure…"

"I'm hungry…"

"We're all hungry! You! Mr. Attitude! How 'bout rounding us up some food here!"

Beat glared at Gum as he strapped his skate on, "I told you already, you're free to go get something. I don't eat in the mornings!" Rhyth gave him the biggest, bluest, kitten-like eyes he had ever seen as she held her stomach for support. She hadn't eaten since yesterday's lunch, so she was starving and Gum was hungry, insisting that breakfast was the most important meal of the day. " *She's more annoying than Yoyo!* " Beat thought, shaking his head with the pathetic notion.

The door to the bathroom opened as Yoyo stepped out, but didn't interrupt the conversation happening in the same room. He leaned on the wall and glanced at Rhyth who looked miserable. "What'sa matter?" he asked, shoving his hands in his pockets. "I'm hungry…" she mumbled, "That's why they're fighting…He says he doesn't eat in the morning…but I haven't eaten since yesterday afternoon! Oh, and Gum's hungry, too."

Yoyo stared at her and reached in his back pocket for his sunglasses, "Guess we're going scavenging for breakfast!" Rhyth watched as he went in between Beat and Gum, quieting them for a moment as he went to get his hood. "Where're *you* going?" Beat asked grimly. "Hey, we got hungry girls here! We can't just lettem' pain out like that, yo!" Yoyo defended, shoving his foot into his skate.

Gum crossed her arms and smiled, "I like this kid. He has a brain. Hopefully he won't lose it by hanging out with you!" she growled, glaring at Beat. "He's your bitch is what he is." Beat snarled back and Yoyo shot up, fuming. He didn't have to do anything though because Gum slapped Beat hard enough to knock him backwards with a five fingered stain across his face. "How's that for getting bitch slapped?" she smirked and neither Yoyo nor Rhyth could help but laugh until their sides hurt.

After the tears of laughter were wiped from their eyes and Beat wouldn't say anything else, but only glare at anything that moved, they left the apartment in search of some breakfast. They soon found a bread shop and shoplifted some bread, donuts, and bagels.

They all skated until they found some outdoor tables with umbrellas to keep them cool. Rhyth chomped down happily as the roaring in her stomach dimmed down.

"Happy now?" asked Gum, watching her eat her fourth bagel. "Yup!" Rhyth giggled, swallowing the large amount of starch in her mouth. Yoyo watched her admiringly, never knowing that a girl could eat that much and keep going. Beat, on the other hand, was keeping watch quietly, making sure no unwanted police popped up. "Do you think those cops will come after us?" asked Rhyth, as if to knock Beat off his guard.

He shrugged, but Gum nodded, "A good chance they will, too. Hayashi's been after me since before I can remember. Now he's caught me once, but amazingly, thanks to you guys, I'm still alive." she said, talking to Beat and Yoyo. Beat gave a quick nod and Yoyo grinned. Rhyth finally finished and burped, covering her mouth and blushing, "Excuse me!" Yoyo smiled and took a chomp from the bagel she couldn't finish.

"I really don't want to be found…I'd rather die out here than live what I'm going to if they find me…" Rhyth admitted, sighing. "I still don't get what's so bad about living with an old guy." shrugged Gum, taking a slice of bread and folding it over. "I'm not just living with him!" said Rhyth, grossed out, "I'll be his wife…so…you know…"

Yoyo closed his eyes and coughed on his bagel, " *Please* can we *not* talk about you and an old guy, yo!" Gum smirked, "Jealous much, Yoyo?" Rhyth glanced at Yoyo as he put his bagel down and crossed his arms, "Aw, c'mon, yo! That's uncalled for! What? Just because I say that Rhyth being married to an old guy is gross that means I'm automatically jealous! It can't mean that its just straight up nasty and I wanna eat without getting any kinda images stuck in my head! Why am I the target!"

Beat arched an eyebrow as Yoyo fumed like a little kid getting blamed for something he didn't do while Gum laughed hysterically. "It's not funny! Why does everyone get a kick out of me getting mad?" Yoyo whined, glaring at her. "Because you get so defensive." muttered Beat, rolling his eyes and Gum agreed. Rhyth sighed, her blush coming out, "Guys, leave him alone…" Gum smiled and Beat

gave Yoyo a warning look. Yoyo glanced away, pretending he didn't notice Beat giving him a 'don't fall for her' look.

Yoyo's insides cracked as he knew he shouldn't feel so defensive about his reputation when it was about Rhyth, or feel the flutters in his gut, or the happiness that he had never felt before when someone smiled at him, but he couldn't help it. It was just part of life. He was after a girl who seemed pretty clueless about it. Meanwhile, Rhyth was looking at other people besides those at her table.

Yoyo swallowed his last piece of breakfast and sighed happily, "So, Beat? When we gonna get back on track with the training thing?" Gum looked at Beat curiously as he shrugged, "Why don't you tag after little Miss know-it-all, here? She's a rudie."

"What are you talking about?" she interrupted and Yoyo yawned, "Remember I told you I got stuck with Beat cus' we're both against cops?"

" *You* got stuck with *me* !" Beat blurted, but Yoyo continued, "Well, we kinda made a deal that if he trained me to be a rudie, he could use my watch that he still has." Yoyo strained on the sentence, glancing at Beat's wrist to make sure it was still there. Beat waved his arm mockingly and leaned his cheek into his palm. "What, can't afford your own?" smirked Gum, crossing her arms. "Oh, I'm sorry, your time was supposed to be up this morning at a *shooting* range!" he growled, and she glared at him.

Rhyth's attention went back on the two. She hated when people argued, but this argument was strange. They would insult each other, then go back to a normal conversation, as if *teasing* each other. Rhyth smiled quietly, slowly catching on to a theory of her own. "Wait a minute, he's *training* you to be a rudie?" asked Gum, staring at Yoyo. Yoyo nodded like nothing, "Yeah?"

Gum looked at Beat, "Are *you* even a rudie? How in the hell are you training a person to become a rudie?" Beat glared at her for all the whining, "I'm not training him to be anything, dammit! I'm just teaching him how to live on the streets so when I eventually throw him out for good, he can defend himself." Yoyo nodded in agreement, then put on a thinking face, " *Hey* !"

Gum crossed her arms in front of her and leaned on the table, "How did you two *meet* ?" Her voice was filled with sarcasm, but Yoyo thought it was an actual question. "Well, I was running away from the cops, yo. I ran away from this orphanage I was bunkin' at. But… the heat was gettin' to me and I hadn't eatin' in a while, so I was seein' two by the time I passed out. Beat kinda saved me from bein' taken back to that hell hole." he explained, making Beat sound like a Good Samaritan.

Meanwhile, Beat had his arms crossed while he watched cars speed by, ignoring anything anyone had to say. Gum raised her eyebrows and glanced at Beat, "You're kidding me, right? This cold, emotionless jerk saved your sorry ass from Rokakku junkies?" Rhyth tilted her head. She noticed Gum liked to swear a lot. Rhyth wasn't much for profanity, but to use it so loosely the way Gum did was interesting for her to listen to.

"Yup!" grinned Yoyo, "He even let me stay the nights and everything…it didn't come easy though…" he added quietly, and Gum understood, already experienced to Beat's temper. The two continued talking while the other two remained quiet until a familiar, but nasty stank filled the air. "Oh shit…" muttered Gum, looking up at the two nearing buffoons, wearing grins of achievement. Yoyo and Rhyth, whose backs were turned to the advancing fools, turned around and Yoyo arched an eyebrow, "Friends of yours?" he muttered.

The two boys didn't catch Beat's attention until they were blocking his view of the street, two feet away from their table. He glared at them, a fist forming on the armrest of the chair. "Hello, Gum." one greeted, slamming his large hand against the table, flinging a few pieces of bread at passerby people. Gum stood up and pushed her chair in calmly, "Jason…" she acknowledged with a nod.

"How'd you get out?" she asked darkly, glaring up at him. He grunted with a chuckle, "Well after hearing that you had escaped, we knew we couldn't just let you roam the streets freely! It's against master's orders." The other Poison Jam member who was accompanying Jason scanned each person at the table and took his pick of Rhyth, skating behind her chair and leaning over the top, guarding her for his own. Yoyo glared at him, but stood still. Gum

was still talking with the other.

"Looks like Henry didn't make it with you guys. Some team you are." mocked Gum, and Jason made a move to hit her, but Beat stopped him, punching him in the gut. Jason snarled and Beat shot up, ready for him, but Gum interrupted, "I already told you I'm not going with you to talk with the master, so just tell 'im to leave me the hell alone!"

Jason made a move for Gum, but she ducked and instead, he ended up fighting with Beat. The other Jammer stood up straight and eyed Gum, but Yoyo gave a good crack to his shin, causing him to fall over with an unexpected pain. Gum zoomed around and pulled out a spray can, soaking the fallen Poison Jammer with red paint and he screamed with shame. Jason punched Beat in his chest, knocking him into the table which toppled over on Rhyth. Beat fell to his knees, holding his stomach in as he spit up some clear fluid and tried to breathe.

Rhyth shook her head as screams from civilians ricocheted from all around. "Uh…oh…" she gasped, reaching for Yoyo's hand. He pulled her up, but the Poison Jammer on the ground was clinging to her leg. With a hard kick to his face she managed to get free, but she froze with fear as police sirens rang in the atmosphere. "RUN!" she screamed, taking off with her hand still laced with Yoyo's. Gum sprayed Jason in his face, blinding him painfully for the moment, and helped Beat up.

The two raced into an alley as they watched the Poison Jam boys speed off in another direction. "We're not safe here." Gum said calmly as Beat held his side. He leaned on the cool brick wall for support as he nodded tiredly. "Are…you okay?" she asked with a tinge of worry in her voice. He glared at her for thinking he was weak in any kind of way, "I'm fine!" he snapped. A yell from one of the police cut off Gum from answering back.

She pushed Beat to the other side of the alley and they looked around for any place to hide until the cops retreated. The only place they could find was another alleyway, but a dead end one. If the police found them, there would be no escape, especially with Beat's injury. He skated to the back of the alley and sat against the wall,

closing his eyes. Slouching hurt and so did breathing. " *That was one hell of a punch…* " he thought, wincing as he rubbed his chest.

"You're gonna have to take it easy." Gum said as she kept an eye out for officers roaming the area for them. "I never take it easy. I'll just ignore it like I always do. Like I said, I'm *fine* !" he grumbled, standing up, but he couldn't help to slightly place his hand on his chest. Gum glanced at him and rolled her eyes, "Why are men so stubborn…" she sighed, rubbing her temples.

On the other side of the block, Rhyth had dashed forward, dragging Yoyo along with her. She was too blinded with worry to care about where they were going or how, as long as they weren't caught. "Rhyth! Slow down! You're making me trip, yo!" complained Yoyo, trying to slow her down, but she wouldn't let him. "No! I won't let them get me! I finally have freedom! I won't go back! They won't take me back!" she ranted hysterically.

Yoyo pulled her off her straight course and led her between two buildings with dumpsters to crouch behind. "Rhyth, you gotta calm down. You're going a little nuts on me. Just take a deep breath and straighten out your nerves." he said softly, trying to keep her from going ballistic. Her lip trembled and she covered her face, tears streaming out of her fingers and sobs escaping her throat. Yoyo stared at her, not for just the shock, but for the noise she was making that could attract attention.

"Shhh!" he cooed, pulling her closer to him and putting an arm around her shoulders, managing to get her to lean on him and cry into his hood, muffling the cry. He patted her shoulder lightly, letting her know he was there as he peeked out every now and then to see if he could catch sight of the others. So far, it was only cops and cars. "Where did they go?" he whispered, taking in the smell of Rhyth's hair. It smelled like fruit. Probably one of those herbal shampoos. He shook his head, " *What am I doing?* " he thought, cheeks brightening.

A stifled sniff interrupted his thoughts, "Yoyo?"

He glanced down at the biggest pair of eyes he had and would ever see on a girl, "Yeah?"

"I-…" her eyes grew even bigger as she clutched on to Yoyo, hearing the voices of three officers right on the other side of the dumpster they were hiding behind. Yoyo put a finger to his lips and sunk his neck into his hood as Rhyth took hold of his arm and held onto it for dear life. He quietly inched closer to Rhyth since she was leaning on the dumpster, hoping to not get caught. One of the officers was talking while the other two were reporting on their walkie talkies about their area. "Nothing here, Captain. Whoever they were, they ran the hell outta here." the two huddling teens overheard.

A static filled response answered the call, but the officers understood it, "Yes, sir."

They started to walk away and the new rudies sighed with relief, smiling. Rhyth slowly let go of Yoyo's arm, but banged her elbow against the dumpster, creating a loud bang and piercing pain running up and down her arm. It took all the agility Yoyo had to cover Rhyth's mouth in time to catch her scream. On the other side, one of the cops looked back and walked over to where they were. "What was that?" he muttered, cursing as a piece of garbage hit him in his head.

"What the hell?"

Yoyo and Rhyth could hear him walking to the opposite side of the street and they relaxed their position. "You okay?" Yoyo asked gently, pulling his hand away. Rhyth rubbed her elbow and sighed, "Hit my funny bone…" Yoyo chuckled, "Sure you got a riot outta that one!" Rhyth gave him a grim glance and he shut his mouth. She wiped her face with her arm and drew a deep breath, glancing out. " *I need to be more calm about this…* " she thought, her left arm still intertwined with Yoyo's. Yoyo leaned forward, glancing to his right. There was another alleyway leading out if they made a right turn at the dead end. He smiled, nudging Rhyth.

Author's Note : Okay, here's another chapter! I'm working on three others so hopefully I'll get this one done soon. I hope to write up a Christmas themed fic for JSRF before Christmas happens, we'll see. Don't forget to review! And aren't those little reply messenger things on this site cool? I love 'em!

-So now that Poison Jam has interrupted our friends' little breakfast chat and the police are out to come, will they meet the psycho cop or something worse? Will they get caught or meet someone new?-

Too Close

Too Close

Gum and Beat skated quickly to the familiar street of his apartment. He reached in his pocket for his key and held it in his hand as he thought about the short past. " *Why did I help her out? She hasn't done squat for me. I do a good thing and look what it's got me. A pain in my chest and a record with the cops. Besides the fact that that idiot's gonna be looking for me because I stood up to him. Why don't I stay to myself like I normally do? What's gettin' into me?* "

Opening the door, he skated to his couch and started unstrapping his skates, kicking them off and resting on the couch. He was beginning to get a headache. Gum closed the door, but peeked out the window. "You think they got out okay?" she mumbled, keeping her eyes focused outside. Beat blinked, moving his goggles to his forehead and removing his headphones, "Probably. There's a chance they got caught, but Rhyth ran off at the speed of light with Yoyo so, that chance is very unlikely."

Gum glanced at him and his eyes traveled from her mid section, eventually meeting with hers. "You never give an answer to please, do you?" she said grimly. He ran his fingers through his hair and stared at his ceiling, "I'm not much for false hope." Gum shook her head and crossed her arms, "Boy, you've got some serious issues, and, just between you and me, I'd rather you keep your eyes focused anywhere besides my ass."

Beat arched an eyebrow as she turned around and smirked. As much as he hated to admit it to himself, Gum was an interesting girl. He had never been hit with his own medicine before, and it was a strange feeling. Almost…a nice feeling. Beat closed his eyes tightly and sighed. He wouldn't let himself be victim to a girl's lure. " *Where the hell are those two?* " he wondered. At least with them around, he wouldn't have to think about Gum. But a simple thought entered his mind, and he had to agree. Life had definitely become more interesting.

Yoyo led Rhyth down the street he had run through so many times before to get away from police. He realized he was still holding her hand and he blushed, feeling uncomfortable. He let her hand go, but she didn't let his go and he smiled lightly. Neither of them talked the entire time, and Rhyth didn't like this.

She sighed and glanced at the care-free boy who was currently grinning while he looked at everything. Rhyth stopped skating, causing Yoyo to be pulled backwards as she still held onto his hand and his grin disappeared. Instead it was replaced with a worried expression, knowing she wanted to talk. She let his hand go and hugged herself, looking to the ground sadly. "You probably think I'm a walking breakdown, huh?"

Yoyo shook his head, "No! Why would you think that?" Both knew the answer to that one. Yoyo rubbed his neck, "Hey, I'm not gonna make fun of ya cause you cried, Rhyth." She looked up at him, her eyes shimmering with embarrassment, "When I'm really nervous or excited, I cry…" Yoyo nodded understandingly. From what he read from her eyes, she was feeling self-conscious. He slid his hands into his pockets and glanced to the side, "When…I think about…my parents…"

She nodded quietly, because she knew this was true. She had seen it two nights before. Heading slightly off topic, she asked him a question she always wondered, "Yoyo? How come boys don't like to cry?" He blinked blankly. It was such a general question. "Well…it's not all guys…and for those who you're talkin' about…I guess its cause not all dudes are good with their feelings and uhm… expressing them?" he tried, struggling with the answer himself. She bobbed her head as they began moving slowly.

"No joke, but I think you're kinda lucky." he said quietly. She tilted her head, "Why do you think that?"

"One thing is girls are excused for crying. It makes *you* feel a hell of a lot better and you don't get teased for it as much as a guy would." he said with a shrug, "Us guys are expected to suck it up." Rhyth kept quiet and smiled a little. He rubbed his arm, "And if yeh

wouldn't mind not telling about this little chat? You know, emotional tugs of war in my life is not what I need right now." She nodded and glanced to the side. Talking with Yoyo was easier than…breathing. Well, almost.

There would always be something she couldn't talk to him about because it was a girl thing or something along those lines, but Rhyth realized she could have a nice conversation with him without feeling stupid or embarrassed as she felt with the people she used to hang out with. When she was allowed to, that is. Peeking at him quickly, her smile grew and her heart pounded lightly. The girl crossed her arms over her stomach and thought for a while.

Yoyo, taking this the wrong way, tilted his head, "You can't be hungry?" She giggled, feeling much better. "No, just thinking." she answered and he nodded with a grin. They turned and entered into the alleyway that led to Beat's door. Rhyth halted for a moment, "You won't…tell?" Yoyo glanced over his shoulder, seeing that she was being completely serious with a tinge of anxiety. "Promise." he smiled, raising his right hand. A light of happiness filled her eyes and she skated by him, first giving him a sudden hug.

This caught Yoyo off his guard as he tensed up and blushed with his mouth agape, but he quickly shut it as soon as she let him go. "Thanks." she said gratefully, yet softly, knocking on the door. "Y-you're welcome…yo…" he muttered, feeling redder by the minute. The door opened, revealing Beat without his headphones or goggles, grumbling about something under his breath. "Hey, Beat! What's wrong, yo?" asked Yoyo, closing the door as soon as Rhyth entered.

"That asshole knocked the wind outta me, that's what's wrong. Cracked me in the chest." Beat growled, throwing himself on the couch, a mistake that cost him some breath taking pain. "Oh… well…uhh, you did the right thing, I guess." Yoyo shrugged, trying to make the situation better. Beat shoved his face into his pillow and sighed, "I have no clue why I butted in."

Rhyth smiled as if she knew the entire reason, "You were protecting Gum, silly!" Knowing this was the wrong answer when Beat glared at her darkly, Rhyth stood behind Yoyo with a timid expression, "It's

not a bad thing…" Yoyo looked around, noticing the bathroom door was open. "Hey, where *is* Gum?" he asked, hoping to get the conversation off of Beat. "I dunno…something about needing supplies or some crap like that." Beat answered, resting his head delicately on the pillow.

"Hmm…oh well. So what's for today's agenda?" asked Yoyo, tossing himself on the smaller couch, leaning his cheek into the palm of his hand. Beat growled and turned over to face the backrest of his couch, "I don't know! I don't make schedules for you to live your life by!" Rhyth glanced at Yoyo with a worried look, but he shrugged and sighed, "Just askin…" Beat grunted, "Well don't!"

Rhyth and Yoyo glanced at each other with a 'he's mad, leave him alone' look. But they honestly didn't know what they could do since the place was so small. As if to answer their thoughts, a bang on the door made them all look towards it. Rhyth glanced between the shades and smiled, "Its Gum." Beat turned over again and Yoyo sat up. She opened the door and Gum came in, holding a small bag of ice, a bottle of pain killers, and a bag of mixed candy.

She dumped the ice and pain killers on Beat's shoulder, banging it against his chest and he moaned. "Oops…" she shrugged, "Those are for you, anyway." She opened the back of candy and took a few for herself and tossed the rest at Yoyo. He dug through the bag and gave it to Rhyth and she did the same. "I don't need no medicine." grumbled Beat, tossing the box to the floor. Gum glanced at him as she sat on the armrest that his head was resting on.

"Take the damn medicine, Beat."

"No! I haven't taken medicine since I was seven years old. Medicine's for short, whiny, weaklings." he said, glancing at Yoyo. Yoyo didn't even look up as he threw a large jawbreaker quickly at him, hitting his head. "Dammit!" growled Beat, "I have a headache!" Yoyo grinned as he looked up, "Then I suggest you take some medicine or it'll only get worse." Beat sat up and grabbed the small bottle, growling, about to throw it at Yoyo, but Gum grabbed his arm and twisted it behind his back.

He clenched his teeth as Gum tisked, "If you won't take it voluntarily,

I'll victimize you into it." Beat grunted angrily. "Are you gonna take it?" she asked in a sweet voice. He glared back at her, "Screw you." Gum shook her head disappointingly, "Hey, I gave you a chance. Yoyo! Rhyth! Come here." The two stood up and followed orders. Beat glared at Yoyo, "I swear I'll kill you!"

"For what? I didn't do anything!" he whined, glancing at Gum. He took her place, holding Beat's arm behind him and Gum took the medicine from Beat's lap, opening the bottle. "I am not letting my thieving go to waste. You're taking this whether you want to or not." Beat snarled at her while trying to pull away from Yoyo, "I hate you." Gum threw out her arm dramatically, "Oh, you've broken my heart! Now I must avenge it!" she grinned, kneeing him in the stomach. He winced and she spilled some medicine in his mouth, having Rhyth hold his head back.

"You bitch!" he fumed, knocking her back, spitting at the same time, but he had already swallowed enough. Gum closed up at the bottle and tossed it to Rhyth, "Bathroom cabinet, Rhyth!" As Rhyth went to place it there, Beat sat up and wiped his face, infuriated. "I tell you people I don't want the freakin' medicine and you shove it down anyway. What the hell is wrong with you idiots!" he yelled, glaring. Yoyo crossed his arms with a careless attitude, "That's kinda harsh, yo, considering we're tryin' to help you out and all."

"I don't want your freakin' help! I want you to leave my home! Get out of my life! Die on the streets for all I care! Just GO!" he screamed, becoming silent after Gum smashed her skate with the back of his head. Rhyth stared at her as she came back, catching the little scene. "It's about time he shut up." Gum sighed, strapping her skate back on. Rhyth glanced over the back of the couch, looking down at the unconscious Beat, "He'll be okay…right?"

Gum nodded, "Yeah, just knocked him cold. And with that medicine, he'll be awake by tomorrow." Yoyo tilted his head and pouted in thought, "So…now what?" Gum smiled mischievously, "Now it's our time to have a little fun. Hero boy here needs a little down time." The three left the apartment, keeping guard for cops and Hayashi, but they saw neither as they skated down the streets.

Gum fetched them some spray cans after Yoyo stopped by each

large tag they saw and admired the work. "Please don't fall for those tags." she drawled, scrunching her nose at a Love Shocker original. "Half the point of living on the streets is to express your inner soul. You have to put your whole heart into your work. These tags," she said, pointing at a Poison Jam one, "these aren't filled with soul. They're just blobs on a wall, meaningless, and foul."

Yoyo stared at the art, realizing there *was* no special feeling about the tag, just colors and staying in the lines. "You need to figure out which tags have soul, and which ones don't. When you do, you'll be ready." smiled Gum and Rhyth tilted her head, "Ready for what?"

"Ready to do your own. Soul starts with inspiration. You can't just start off the brick wall without an idea. You want every piece of your art to be something worth looking at. You want every tag you've ever made to be worthy of your name. You want…to…help me look for Yoyo, cause he's gone." she said, off track. Rhyth blinked, "Huh?" She looked left and right. He *was* gone. "Yoyo?" she called out, wondering where he went.

Gum skated around, calling him like a lost dog. "Over here, yo!" he called from an alleyway. The girls skated to where he was, and realized he had been staring at some piece of work. It was definitely something worth pausing at. It took up the entire alleyway wall and the colors were blended in so perfectly, it had to be an inspiration of soul blown full blast. Yoyo stood with his mouth open, admiring the artwork. The background was a royal blue, there had to be some mixing in spray colors there, with a silky blood red banner on the outsides.

In the center of the wall were humongous letter Gs, shining a radiant gold coming out in dimensions on their left sides, a crusty version of yellow with white lines outlining them. On the sides of these Gs were cans and flags of all different colors with a banner on the bottom that preached, " **We will be heard.** " in a baby blue over white. "Wow…" Yoyo sighed, his eyes huge, "This…is amazing…"

Gum looked up and smiled happily, "Congradulations, Yoyo! You've found soul." He skated back and forth, "This had to take days to accomplish!" Rhyth tilted her head slightly as she bent over, "…I only see one signature here." Yoyo raced to her side and looked at

the name in awe. "You've gotta be shittin' me…"

Gum made her way to them, "What?" Yoyo pointed, "It was one guy. One guy did this whole thing. That's crazy…this is freakin' crazy! He's a genius!" Gum looked at the name and immediately her face lit up. "Oh my God…" she whispered, looking up at the art. "He's here!" A worried expression overcame Rhyth's face, "Who's here?"

"My friend…the one I was telling you about before! The one who's starting his own gang! He's here!"

Rhyth and Yoyo followed Gum as she led them out happily. Maybe there was hope for her plans. Maybe they really could take out this Rokakku guy? Who knows? But the only thing that ran through Yoyo's mind was, "Who names himself after a vegetable?"

Author's Note : *For all of you who don't know, corn (the food) isn't a vegetable. You learn that in biology class which is what Yoyo would probably be learning if he wasn't on the streets. Not that it's a fact that'll help you out in life or anything. Okay, so, read, review, and let me know how you like. Thanks. (And sorry for late update, studying for midterms.)*

Loving Rescue

Loving Rescue

Author's Note: *(ducks from thrown garbage) OMG! I haven't updated this beast in a looooooong time. Well, becoming obsessed with a totally kick ass band (coughGorillazcough) sorta takes time up, hm? But no excuse! Even though Cibo Matto is related to Gorillaz considering she played as Noodle in Phase One! So I was still thinking of JSRF in a way…ahem…and 2D has nothing to do with this, but I shall get his little figure…well 13 inches tall is kinda…tall…for a figure but ANYWAYS! I typed this chapter and a bunch more like…a year ago and never posted it. I feel like such an ass. Well, if anyone's still reading this…here you go!*

They followed Gum all the way back to Beat's apartment where they found the teen still sleeping, or knocked out. They weren't sure which. Gum pulled Beat up a little, resting his head comfortably on the armrest and pushing his legs to the side so she could sit. That cushion had become her property. "This guy is grade A one hundred percent tough, huh?"

Yoyo shrugged, "Hey, I told you already. That's how he is, yo."

"I don't think so…"

The two looked at Rhyth, who was quietly seated on her side of the other couch. She was leaning her cheek against the palm of her hand, watching Beat sleep. Yoyo sat on the other cushion and pulled up a knee, "Whaddya mean?" She didn't move her gaze, "I mean, he may be a little strong with his words and appear to be ice cold, but he isn't totally rock hard." Gum glanced at him and softly smiled, but stopped as soon as she caught herself. She couldn't be smiling at him. He didn't deserve it.

"Coulda fooled me, yo." muttered Yoyo, rubbing his arm lazily. "Well, he has to have some heart in him if he saved you from the police,

right?" Rhyth said, turning her head to him.

"Well….I guess…"

"And he agreed to break Gum out from jail, also allowing me to come along, right?"

"Right…"

"And he's been letting us stay here, even if he put up an argument over it, he's still letting us be here, and don't forget he stood up for you, Gum!"

Gum sighed, hoping Rhyth wouldn't bring that up. But she did, and the two were staring at her, waiting for her to say something. She closed her eyes, her pride slightly defeated, "I guess he did, didn't he?" Rhyth nodded happily and Yoyo rolled his eyes, hating mushy girly moments. "So where would your friend be right now?" he interrupted, feeling highly grossed out.

Gum opened her eyes and they flashed with seriousness as she leaned over and laced her fingers, "Hmm…Corn's a difficult person to predict…he goes to his own flow, you know what I mean? God knows where he could be this time of day…" Yoyo shook his head, "Didn't you say he found a place big enough for a gang to hideout in?" She nodded, "Yes, but that's where I was going the day I got caught. I was on my way to meet him so he could show me where it was. Writing stuff down and mailing is dangerous business, nowadays, police go through your mail."

Yoyo shoved his hands into his pockets as he stood up and paced in thought. According to Gum, Corn was the best of the best, and Yoyo was probably the worst of the worst. If he could only think opposite for a moment, where would that lead him? "Right now…I'm hiding from cops…keeping a low profile…trying to figure out everything I need to know for living against the streets…" he mumbled, with the girls staring at him.

"But…if I was a pro at this already…" he started with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, "I would be out on the streets, spreading my name, getting the cops annoyed, and recruiting some kids who know

the streets like the back of their hands!" he shouted excitedly, and Rhyth jumped. Gum tapped her cheek in wonder, seeing herself agreeing to Yoyo's theory. "That definitely sounds like something Corn would be doing…considering he's trying to start his own gang and everything…so it makes sense! And you make it sound like you never think!" she smirked, ruffling his hair.

Gum glanced out the shades, "The sun is setting already…we can start looking for him tomorrow, if we get dad's permission, that is." she finished, glancing at Beat. Yoyo snickered and shook his head. At the same time, his stomach burst a growl for food. He blushed and grinned, "Guess I'm hungry." Gum glanced at Rhyth, who was already getting that look for food in her eyes, "Yeah, I guess we could go for something to eat. Well…" she said, pulling some money out of her dress, "You can't really mug for a pizza, so take this and get a pie."

She gave the money to Rhyth and she stared back. "You want *me* to get it?" Gum sat herself back on the couch and relaxed with her arms supporting her head, "Well, you do have the money, now don't you?" Rhyth nodded nervously, "B-but, its night…" Gum arched an eyebrow, not sure what the girl before her was getting at. "So?" she commented carelessly. Rhyth rubbed her elbow uncomfortably, "Isn't it…dangerous?"

Gum sighed, understanding her now, "Rhyth, this is your home now. You can't be afraid of the streets or you'll get torn apart by dogs. But, since this is your first time alone…" she said getting up and opening the door. Rhyth skated out slowly and Gum grabbed Yoyo by his hood, throwing him out, "You can take a knight in shining armor! Get a cheese pizza and behave you two!" she winked, closing the door as fast as the words left her mouth.

Yoyo clenched his teeth as he got up and dusted himself off, "I think she likes picking on me." Rhyth began skating out of the alleyway, "No, I think it was a way to spend more time with Beat." Yoyo cocked his head to the side, "Nah! She doesn't like Beat! …Does she?" Rhyth giggled, "Not all girls like showing their emotions, Yoyo." Yoyo shrugged, "I still think it wouldn't make sense. Beat's sleeping. It's not like she can have a decent conversation with him."

Rhyth looked at Yoyo oddly, "You don't have to talk to a person to enjoy a moment spent with them." Yoyo bobbed his head slightly until his eyes popped open, "Whoa! What are *you* talking about?" Rhyth looked at him innocently as they passed a few shops, "I didn't mean anything like *that* , Yoyo!" He grinned teasingly, "Yeah, sure. So you *do* get thoughts like that in your 'deprived', pure, innocent mind, eh Rhyth?"

"I do not!" she pouted, in Yoyo's opinion, making her look even cuter than when she was frustrated. "You're the one who needs their mind washed out with heavy duty soap, you pervert!" she growled, glaring at him. He laughed as they neared a pet shop which was right next to the pizzeria. "Ah, we're teenagers, Rhyth! Don't make it sound like a sin for a thought or two to damage our minds a little." he winked.

Rhyth rolled her eyes, thinking that Yoyo needed something to eat and he was lacking sleep indefinitely. He was going a little too teenage for her liking. Her eyes widened and shimmered as they began to pass the pet shop, and she paused, leaning against the glass. Below were a couple of puppies snapping playfully at each other as in another box, kittens were sleeping all cuddled up. "Aww…." she melted, her heart filling three times as much with love.

Yoyo glanced back, noticing she had stopped and skated back to where she was, smiling a bit. "Cute pups." he smirked as a yellow one chomped on another's ear. "What about the kitties?" asked Rhyth in a bubbly tone, glancing at him with her eyes aglow. "They're cute, I guess, but I never really liked cats…I'm more of a dog person." They stood there, watching the animals play with each other for about five minutes and Yoyo's stomach growled. He grabbed her wrist gently, "Hey, I think we should get the pizza now."

The fluttery, happy light in Rhyth's eyes slowly died out, "Aw…but I wanna see the babies…" Yoyo rubbed his neck, wanting to please this girl and his stomach at the same time. "Look, I'll get the pizza, but when I come back, we gotta head home, alright?" he offered, and Rhyth smiled as if this was the best present he could have ever given her. "Okay! Thank you, Yoyo!" she squealed, sliding her arms around him and nuzzling her cheek into his chest.

She froze and quickly let him go, realizing what she was doing. He

swallowed and nodded, face fully consumed in red, "I-I…uhm… pizza…n-now." he managed to say, zooming into the pizza shop. Rhyth stood glued to her spot with her heart beating against her chest as if she had seen the scariest movie on earth. She even felt dizzy, but it was a happy dizzy. Almost…a fluttery dizzy…

She kept her eyes low as she tried to hide her smile, but there was no possible way to hide the blush blotting her skin around her cheeks and nose. Rhyth didn't notice anyone by the counter, but the door was open and the lights were on, so she assumed the store was open. As she picked up one of the kittens that had awoken and allowed him to nuzzle against her cheek, she thought about Yoyo. The more she thought about him, the more she came to understand that she was developing a crush on him. She wasn't too sure about it, but whenever he smiled, she felt happy and when he was embarrassed, she thought it was the most adorable thing.

She scratched the kitten behind its ears and it mewed softly. She closed her eyes and cuddled it against her cheek, loving the creature for what it was. Her happy state was cut short by a male yell and a whine of fear. She quickly placed the kitten back in its box with the rest and tiptoed the best she could to the back of the store, where there was an open door that was labeled, " **Employees Only** ". She held her breath and leaned to her right, peeking in.

From where she was, she could see that the next room was more of a cellar; its walls lined with hardwire cages and a few tables with knives and spoons on them. One of them she saw soiled with… blood. Her eyes widened, "What kind of place is this…?"

"SHUT UP YOU PIECE OF SHIT!"

Her eyes zoomed to the only person in the room. He was tall, pale, with dark eyes and black hair pulled into a tight pigtail in the back. His clothes were tattered, exact type to be working on a farm, but his face was covered in scars, a monster for people and animals alike. A shock of fear ran through Rhyth's veins by just looking at him. He made the room feel like ice and darkness. " *He takes care of these sweet animals?* " she wondered, her stomach fearing the worst.

Right on cue, a small Chihuahua crawled out, half terrified with

death labeled in its eyes. It kept quiet, but the man kicked it anyway, flinging it to the other side of the room. A small whine came from the animal, but that was it. Rhyth's heart cracked deeply for its pain, if it was still alive. She glared at the evil caretaker with hate, tears burning at her eyes. A sudden bark startled her as a medium sized dog charged for the man, biting his leg gruesomely.

The man smacked at the dog, cursing at him and trying to shake him loose. It finally let go, and snuck under one of the creepy tables, knowing better than to come out for some biscuits the man was offering it. The man growled, throwing the entire box at the table with force and grabbed the nearest garbage bag, opening a back door and leaving the room. Rhyth snuck in a little more, wondering if the Chihuahua was okay. She entered the room cautiously, chest on fire, throat feeling very dry.

She crept to where the man had kicked it, and her lip trembled as she pet the limp animal's body gently. It was gone…

Angry tears steamed down her face as she ran out of the room, unaware of a small shadow following her. She burst through the front door, bumping into someone immediately. "Whoa! Hey, when I said we gotta get home, I didn't mean…what happened?" Rhyth looked up as Yoyo's emotion went from joking to dead serious. "Inside…the owner…or whoever he is, he's mistreating the animals! There are weird tools on the shelves in the back room and I saw him kick a little puppy…" after that scene, she couldn't hold it back anymore.

She sobbed into Yoyo's shoulder as he held her in a hug, rubbing her back gently. "I-It was j-just a baby puppy…" she sighed, trying to catch her breath, as she faced away from his neck. "Rhyth, there are some sick bastards in this world…and they'll get their cut in the end…" he whispered, leaning his head against hers. "Yoyo, he killed it." she said shakily, sniffing.

"He killed it?"

"He killed it."

Rhyth pulled away from his comforting grasp to look back through

the glass window. "We have to do something." Yoyo looked at her worriedly, "Like what?" She placed her hand against the show glass and sniffed, the tears streaming down her cheeks, "Like saving these animals…" Yoyo's eyes widened, "Y-you mean…like right now?" Rhyth turned and faced him, staring into his eyes with such determination it scared him, "Yoyo, if we don't get these animals out tonight, some won't live till tomorrow! That nutso was after this other dog, but it hid from him. Please, Yoyo, I don't wanna sleep tonight with an unsure feeling if that poor animal made it out alright or not!"

Yoyo scrunched his face in thought with the guilt that Rhyth was loading on him. He glanced at the pizza box in his hands and sighed, "Well, you know Beat probably wouldn't go for it…" Rhyth looked at Yoyo with her lip trembling, deeply hurt that he wouldn't take this seriously. "But," he continued, glancing at the store, "I'm not Beat. What's the plan?" Rhyth sniffed a choppy breath with a tearful smile, wanting to throw her arms around him and hug him tight, but he was holding pizza and it wouldn't be a comfortable hug.

She didn't know how to thank him, but time was slipping away. Besides, she could always thank him later. "Well, there's a back door and a bunch of filled cages in the room back there. And then there are the animals there in the front room…" she said, glancing at the storefront. "We just gotta get that punk outta the way first…" added Yoyo, pulling the door open. Rhyth entered in, and Yoyo followed in, placing the pizza on the front counter. The smell traveled to the back room, arousing the owner of the shop.

"What the hell-oh, hi. We close in fifteen." the man said, unlocking a door behind the counter, leading into a smaller room that belonged to him. It had a small desk and TV on top with a swivel chair. The furniture hardly fit in the room, but the man put something from his pocket in the desk and closed the door halfway. Yoyo noticed he continually glanced at their pizza that was on the counter, sizzling with cheesy goodness.

Rhyth inspected the animals held in the cages, as if she was going to buy them, but she was really thinking within her mind, " *Don't worry little guys! We're gonna get you out of this hell hole. I promise!* " She quickly made her way to the back door, which was left open and she stared at the small rabbit in front of her, focusing on its fluffy

little ears, its beady little eyes, and pink little nose, subconsciously focused on the door to her right.

Yoyo walked from the glass display to Rhyth, "See any one you'd like?" he asked, keeping suspicion low. The man checked his watch, "Thirteen minutes, buddy." Yoyo nodded and squinted to see the name tag, "Thanks for the update…Conni." The man gave a nod to Yoyo and glanced at Rhyth with a stare that made Yoyo want to smash the guy's teeth in. Rhyth jumped as if she had been shocked with electricity, "Do you have a bathroom here and if yes, may I use it?" she asked with a perky attitude.

Yoyo gave her an awkward expression as Conni, the store's owner, nodded with a smile, "Of course you can, beautiful." He led her to the back room and showed her the door. "Thank you!" she said happily, closing the bathroom door. Conni came back looking pleased with himself. He leaned on the counter, very close to the pizza, "That's some friend you have there." he said to Yoyo, and he replied icily, "Yeah."

"Are you two together?"

"We came in together, didn't we?" Yoyo snapped, hating this guy more and more. He paid attention to the animals in the cages, turning his back on the jerk. "No, I mean, a couple." the manager asked in a sleepy tone. Yoyo's fingers curled into fists and he clenched his teeth, spinning around, "Look dipsh-"

"Excuse me."

Yoyo glared at the man as he went into his private little room, closing the door to answer the business phone. Yoyo snorted, spitting on the floor, "Lucky bastard…" An arm waved to him from the back room and he rushed over, "Rhyth! I-" Her hand clamped over his mouth as she continued talking quietly on the phone that was in the room. "Yes, do you carry purebreds?" she asked in a very snooty, arrogant voice.

She pointed at the cages and he nodded. He pushed open the back door quickly and set the cage on the top to lock in so the door would stay open. He opened each cage and carried whatever animal it was

to the door, giving them a little push to run off. A medium white dog shot out from nowhere and began trying to jump on Yoyo, wanting to grab his attention. Yoyo glanced down at it, "Go on, boy! Get outta here!" The dog sat and wagged its tail with its mouth open, resembling a grin. It followed Yoyo as he ran back and forth continually, freeing the animals as Rhyth held the owner on the phone.

Yoyo snuck quickly to the front and released those animals which were locked up or in a storefront box. He grabbed the pizza box and waved his arm to Rhyth. She suddenly hung up the phone and raced out with him, hearing a scream a few seconds later. "GET BACK HERE!" she heard the owner scream in fury as a few dogs cornered him and attacked. Most of the animals ran off, happily howling or screeching freedom, but five dogs followed after Rhyth and Yoyo.

"I helped get them out, but we *cannot* bring them home, yo!" Yoyo yelled in a breath. A familiar ring sirened through the air, alarming the two. "Of course he *had* to call cops!" groaned Yoyo, ducking into an alleyway, pulling Rhyth with him. The dogs chased after and kept quiet in the alley, looking up at Yoyo. Their eyes were focused on the box in the boy's hands, the smell keeping them attached to him. A cop car sped by, screeching at a few halts due to some animals jotting across the streets.

"Just a few blocks." whispered Rhyth, and they made a run for it, dashing as fast as they could. The familiar buildings welcomed them, and the shadows hugged them into safety. Rhyth banged her fist against the door so hard she felt her pinky pop and she squealed, snatching her hand back. Before Yoyo could ask if she was alright, the door whipped open with Gum, staring at them. "Guys! I gave you money to get it, you didn't have to ste…what's with the dogs?" she said suddenly, watching as five dogs entered the apartment, sniffing everything in sight.

"Uhm…well, heheh, it's a funny story, really!" Yoyo started as he handed her the pizza and she became the popular one with the dogs. "I'd love to hear it sometime…" Gum said, trying to avoid stepping on any of them. Rhyth, however, was practically in heaven as she hugged each of them and played with them happily.

"Okay, let me get this straight. You and Rhyth went to get pizza and on your way there, Rhyth saw this mean guy who was abusing the animals so you somehow manage to break all the animals out and you have a police report and search against you?"

"That's pretty much it." nodded Yoyo, trying to keep his slice from mutts. "You guys better get rid of these dogs before Captain Cranky wakes up from his beauty sleep." Gum warned, scooting a large black dog from her spot on the couch. "You're Shadow." named Rhyth, petting his head. He barked happily, but nothing was going to wake Beat up. It's amazing what medication and a knock to your head can do to you.

She tickled a smaller white dog behind its ears and cuddled her, "You're Angel!" Yoyo smirked as she named the other two Beetles and Misty. Yoyo shook his head, "You know what they say, Rhyth! Once you name it, you grow attached to it." Rhyth blushed slightly, "Well, they need proper names! We can't just say *you* all the time. And if one's bad I need to know which and…"

"Rhyth, we're not keeping them." he reminded, sitting in his own spot.

"Yeah, but…."

Gum sighed, "Fine, name them. But remember. We're finding homes for them by tomorrow." Yoyo tilted his head as a bright idea bloomed, "I know the perfect place."

Author's Note: *And where will that be? Well you won't hafta wait long since I have the answering chapter already long done, but I won't post it for another couple of days. I like to see how I'm doing, even one will do. XD*

Drop Off

Drop Off

Yoyo smiled smugly, crossing his arms behind his head comfortably. "Where?" asked Rhyth, wanting to make sure this place would be a good home for her new friends. "My old home. The orphanage!" he answered with a smile, but Rhyth looked at him as if he were crazy.

"Why would you want to leave them there if you didn't even want to stay?" she fumed, crossing her arms. Yoyo shook his head, waving his hands, "No, you got it wrong! The orphanage wasn't for me. *I* didn't belong. They send you off to be with all kinds of families, hoping that one will adopt you, but I didn't wanna get adopted. That's why I ran away. But the kids there…my friends…they need something to cheer them up. They're already depressed. They need some real friends who won't be taken away from them by some fake family when they need them the most."

Gum watched as Yoyo took this matter in personally. He really wanted to make those kids smile for once. Rhyth tapped her cheek in thought, "Well…"

"Please, Rhyth? They'll treat these guys like gold, yo!" he said, extremely sure of himself. She stood and paced, glancing at each dog, wagging their tails at her with grins. "How can I say no?" she giggled happily, "It solves two problems and it's the greatest way to help those you care about…" Rhyth sat on her side while she gazed at Yoyo with adoration and newfound love, but he didn't seem to notice. He was too busy trying to keep Shadow from licking his face.

Gum chuckled as Beat flopped over in his sleep, "I think you made a new friend, Yoyo!" Yoyo looked at her weakly, "I'm making too many friends at the same time, yo…" Gum placed the rest of the pizzas on the floor and the dogs chomped them up in seconds. "Hm, good dogs." she smirked, sitting back down and resting her head against the couch and closing her eyes. Yoyo removed his skates and socks, stretching out his feet. He twisted his mouth to the side and

said so randomly, "Feet are weird…"

Rhyth giggled to this and he glanced at her, "Well, it's true." He sighed as he flicked off the lights and stumbled over Beetles to get to the couch. "Move it, Fluffy…" he said grumpily, and Rhyth shook her head in the dark, "Not Fluffy! Beetles!" Yoyo crunched up on his cushion and shrugged, removing his shades, "Fluffy, Beetles, same difference." They stayed quiet for a while and Rhyth, thinking Gum was asleep, reached her hand over to Yoyo's and held it up. "Yoyo?"

His cheeks were already painted a light pink, "Yeah?"

"I never got to thank you for helping me…"

"Ah, forget it, yo. It was no big deal."

"It was to me…"

Yoyo sat up and Rhyth did the same. Rhyth's eyes were fixated on him with the happiest glow he had ever seen. It made him feel floaty and bubbly, but he didn't do anything about this feeling. He knew he shouldn't be feeling this way, it could ruin him. Or so Beat thought. Well, if he wasn't going to do anything, she would. Rhyth leaned forward, wrapping her arms around his, preventing him from pushing her away, and he swallowed with difficulty. They were nose to nose and both their chests felt tight and their heads, light. Yoyo's heart hammered against his rib cage as Rhyth closed her eyes and leaned even closer, with only one action available for their faces to be that close for.

He suddenly yelped as something jumped him, slurping his face from chin, up. Rhyth immediately let him go and she went into a fit of giggles as the medium sized white dog was perched on Yoyo's chest, wagging his tail excitedly as he gave Yoyo his own kisses. "Ack! Pthh! Get offa me!" Yoyo spat, wiping his mouth in vain. "That was disgusting!"

Gum felt as if her lungs were about to collapse from holding in her laugh. That little dog had totally ruined the romantic moment between her two friends. Rhyth picked the dog up and hugged him, "Hey! I didn't name *you* !" The dog sniffed her nose with curiosity. He

was almost white all over. He had a gray spot in almost the shape of a star on his back, his little ears were gray, and his paws were gray, too. "How about Spot…" yawned Yoyo, resting his head on the couch backrest.

"Nooo, that's too plain of a name. It needs to be unique. This is the one who stood up to that meanie. Aren't you a good boy?" she cooed, scratching his ears and the dog calmed down, laying on her lap. "Hmm…" she hummed, staring at the dog drowsily, "You know, I can't think of anything at the moment." Yoyo nodded, "Ditto, name him tomorrow when we bring them all to the orphanage." He stretched and cracked his neck, but froze when he felt something smooth, yet warm on his cheek.

He stared at Rhyth, face in full blush, as she made herself comfortable and smiled, her cheeks a rosy pink. "Good night." she whispered softly, closing her eyes. Yoyo touched his cheek slightly and grinned, feeling the heat of his face warm up his hand. Gum watched with a smile as he rested back and nodded happily, "Night, Rhyth."

"What…no…stop! Get away!" mumbled Beat as he flipped over and wiped his face for the third time in his sleep. Angel was perched on top of Beat's armrest, her nose in his face, smelling the sleeping teen. He waved at her a couple of times, but she didn't move, only twitched her head to the side with a confused manner. The unnamed dog that had bunked with Rhyth and Yoyo on their couch jumped off from Rhyth's lap and joined Angel, wagging his tail.

Angel looked up at him and wagged her tail happily, but went back to sniffing Beat's ear. The spotted dog dared to climb down by Beat and stand on his chest, licking the boy's face. Beat grumbled in his sleep, a pained expression on his face. Angel ducked as his arm flew back and the spotted one growled, thinking this was an attack, and bit Beat's arm. Beat's eyes popped open and he sat up, forcing Angel to fall back and the other dog to shoot forward. Beetles, Shadow, and Misty ran under the couch, afraid that this boy might be like their last caretaker, whining in fear.

The spotted dog growled at Beat and Beat stared at the dog in shock. Beat reached forward, thinking this was some kind of dream, but glared at the animal once it snapped at him. "What the hell is this?!" he fumed, pushing the dog off his legs. Gum, who was the only one awake at the time, smirked, "We had some night visitors." Beat swung his legs over the side and stepped on Shadow's tail, forcing the dog to yelp and wake Yoyo and Rhyth with a start.

"What happened?" asked Rhyth, groggily and alarmingly. Gum shook her head, "Beat stomped a tail, I think." Beat looked down as a large black dog struggled to get out from under the couch and tilt its head at him. Beat clenched his teeth, " *Yoyo* !"

Rubbing his eye grouchily, the green headed teen gave a stiff sniff, "Whaaat, *yo* ?"

"What did you do?!"

Rhyth glanced at Yoyo as he was about to blame it on himself and she interrupted before he could say anything, "It was my idea, Beat." Beat arched an eyebrow as Yoyo stared at Rhyth. "Why'd you bring a bunch of mutts to my home?" he asked sternly, but not nearly as nasty as he would've been with Yoyo. She looked at her hands and sighed, "There was a man abusing them and we broke them free…"

" *We* ?" Beat said suddenly, looking angry again. Rhyth nodded, her bones freezing with an uncomfortable fear. "M-Me and…Yoyo…"

"I knew he was in this! You're always in everything! I want these things out!" Beat snarled, and the small spotted dog growled back at him, not liking Beat at all. "Shut up, you!" Beat hissed, but the dog only gnashed its teeth. Gum rolled her eyes, "You should be proud of these two! While you were out for the count, they rescued these poor little guys and they're going to drop them off at a home today, so stop your whining."

Beat breathed deeply as he tried to ignore this girl besides him, telling him to calm down when she *knew* how he was. He wasn't the welcoming type to anything, especially animals or people. He was used to living alone, it was how he lived for years and now Gum was trying to reroute his life. Gum and the troublesome duo. Beat glared

at them all, "They better be out by noon." he commented, and locked himself in his bathroom. His only room of solitude.

He didn't want to face other teenagers. He wanted his old home back, with its quiet walls, secret corners, and abundant thinking space for him to plot his revenge against Hayashi. He wanted to hit Hayashi where it hurt without being figured out easily. Without Hayashi knowing who he was, but at the same time, he would. However, these three weren't going to let him accomplish his promise. Beat shook his head as he removed his headgear and ran his hand through his hair. He looked so tired and worn. So…unlike the last time he had checked himself in the mirror.

His face showed the stress he was acquiring, his eyes filled with drowsiness and frustration, his hair messy and uncared for, his skin looking pale and soft. He had never allowed himself to look in such a state. "What's getting into me…" he mumbled, banging his head slightly against the glass. "Its these *people* …" he whispered icily under his breath. The redhead removed his clothing and stepped in the shower, releasing some of the fuming anger he had boiling in him. He knew he had an anger problem, but it was his issue and he knew how to deal with life.

A sudden thought entered his mind. How was he going to wash his clothes with these people around? He rolled his eyes stressfully, after hearing a bang on the door. "Beat? We're stepping out to drop off the dogs. We'll be back later!" he heard Gum call to him, hoping he heard through the pelting sound of hundreds of water droplets. A smile slowly crept on his face, "Finally…I'll be alone…"

Rhyth held onto Angel and Beetles, since they were two of the easiest to carry while Misty followed Gum and Yoyo had Shadow and the spotted one after him. "One more block and we're there." he said, trying to get Shadow's attention from this little girl who had gone to pet the dog. Luckily, Shadow was friendly, but Yoyo didn't want any problems if the dog decided to nip at her.

Rhyth kept quiet through most of the trip, but guilt and sadness was eating away at her heart with every step she took. She trusted Yoyo

ninety nine percent, there was always the one percent suspicion, but she ignored that until now. He didn't want to stay in that place, which is why he ran away from it. How could she leave the animals in a place a human didn't even want to live? She glanced at Yoyo with a discomforted look, but he was playfully teasing Misty as she ran around him and Shadow.

Rhyth smiled a bit and shook her head, " *This place will be okay. It will* ."

Gum, on the other hand, her mind was somewhere else. She walked straight ahead, following Yoyo, but her mind continually flashed images of the teen they had left behind. Not that she was obsessed or anything, but Beat was a very confusing person. He was always angry, he had a short temper, and he didn't have patience for anything or anyone. If something didn't go his way, he blew up and he was more stubborn than trying to get a cat into a tub of water. For some reason, he also seemed to hate her most of all. Gum couldn't have a decent conversation with him without it turning into an argument or a mocking statement.

Deep down, she really didn't want it to be that way. She got along with Rhyth, who was the first to open up to her, yet shy in doing it, and then Yoyo, who had no problem telling her any piece of his mind or past, but Beat was another story. He was the only one she knew basically nothing about, except for what she saw, and what she saw disturbed her. A girl like Gum saw through guys in two seconds. She could tell what he was thinking, what more or less his life was like, and if he was worthy of her time.

But she couldn't find any of that with Beat. His eyes may be a soft and melty chocolate, but they were colder than ice when it came to revealing anything. It was as if he knew how to lock his feelings in at all times, not wanting to be weak in any way possible. Gum would have ignored Beat for all these actions, even the mystery of his eyes, but as she walked into Yoyo as he suddenly stopped, she realized both she and Beat had one thing in common. They were missing something important in their lives and they weren't sure what it was.

"Gum? Are you okay?" piped a sharp voice, waking Gum from her

thoughts. She blinked and stared and the shorter teen, shaking her head back into reality, "Oh, yeah. I'm fine. Just thinking. Are we here?" Yoyo nodded, but backed away. "Now just ring the bell, ask for Mary Susan and tell her you're some kinda therapeutic group dropping off puppies at orphanages or something."

Rhyth hugged the dogs in her arms, "Where are you going?" Yoyo looked back guiltily, "Rhyth, I ran away from this place. I don't exactly wanna get caught and be running from those foster homes again. I don't belong here. I belong on the streets, where the real life begins." he grinned, but Rhyth looked at him with big sad eyes. He winced, "Aw, c'mon, Rhyth! I promise they'll love it here! They won't get brought into different homes like the kids! Trust me! Mary loves animals just like you do, yo!"

Gum looked up at the building. It seemed fairly new with red brick decorating the outside and stairs with marble steps on the surface. The doors were a nice bright red color with a sign above that said, " *Bring home a family today!* **Mikyanu Orphanage** ". Gum sighed and removed her helmet, tossing it to Yoyo, "Don't lose that." It was strange that her hair stood perfectly in place, as if she hadn't worn anything on her head at all, but Rhyth stood frozen, not wanting to move. Yoyo skated up to her, "Please Rhyth? I'm your friend! I wouldn't ever lie to you."

Rhyth glanced at Gum, who nodded, and she removed her headphones and gloves, handing them to Yoyo. "Have to look presentable, right?" she tried, gathering the dogs. "You always look presentable…" Yoyo whispered quietly, blushing, and he skated away into an alley next to the orphanage. Rhyth and Gum clomped up the steps, ringing the doorbell. They flashed on smiles as soon as the door opened, and an older woman with a grouchy expression answered, "What do you want?"

"Is she related to Beat?" wondered Gum as Rhyth leaned forward with her arms behind her back, "Hi! We're from the IYGA, the International Youth Gatherers Association, and our job is to bring happiness to those who are suffering some unfortunate events." Gum stared at her as the idea came out almost memorized and picked up Beetles, "Your orphanage was requested by an anonymous writer that the children here needed something bright in

their lives, and what better than some puppies?"

The old woman grunted, "I don't take in stray animals. This is a home for children!" Rhyth swallowed quickly, but trusted in Yoyo, "The letter was referenced that we speak with a Mary Susan?" The old woman rolled her eyes and opened the door wider, "Come in. Right now the children are in the playroom." The girls followed the old woman with the dogs right behind them. She stopped suddenly in front of an old looking room with a musty smell to it, where children were just laying about with nothing to do. There were no toys in the room, nor TVs or magazines. The children hanging out there ranged from six to fifteen years of age, and they all looked at the girls.

"What's this? More teens to add to our ever growing home?" asked a dark haired boy with gray eyes. He seemed very cold towards Gum and Rhyth, and they didn't like that too much. He was a little shorter than Yoyo and wore a white T-shirt with dark blue jeans and socks. His arms were crossed over his chest in an ill-tempered manner, easy to spot since he was the only one standing in a dark corner by himself.

"Be quiet, Wolfgang, they brought puppies for you kids to enjoy." the old woman snapped, and every child's face lit up except for his, but he did seem surprised. "Since when did anyone ever give a shit about us…" he muttered, giving Gum and Rhyth a curious look. All the children ran at the puppies, who were overjoyed about the attention and every child treated the puppies with love and tender care, just like Yoyo said they would. Rhyth watched as one child took off his shoe, just to play fetch with Shadow and some little girl removed her own bow to place on Angel's head.

Gum shook her head as she watched the kids play with the animals, acting like it was Christmas. "Wow…Yoyo really wasn't lying…" Rhyth felt happy and depressed at the same time. Happy that the children were getting joy from this, but depression because she could only imagine what it was like when Yoyo was there. The old woman screeched for Mary and glared at the boy who was still standing alone. "Why don't you make yourself useful and take out the trash?" she hissed, tired from yelling. He glared at her and grunted as he left the room with scorn. A small girl looked up at

Rhyth, about six or seven, "Don't worry, he's not mad because you came. It's because he doesn't have any friends no more."

Rhyth blinked, "Did they get adopted and he didn't?" she asked softly, kneeling down to talk. The girl shook her head, her long blond hair waving back and forth, "No…his friend ran away…and didn't come back."

Yoyo paced back and forth, then suddenly stopped, wondering why he was worrying. Rhyth and Gum wouldn't rat him out. They were his friends. He smiled slowly and leaned against the cool brick wall, thinking about the night before. He and Rhyth had jumped out on a limb to rescue these animals, and he could still feel the flutters of when Rhyth had given him a good night kiss. He grinned and blushed, knowing Rhyth was special to him.

She wasn't supposed to be, but he figured that Beat didn't want Yoyo to have the one thing he didn't. A girl to call his own. Rhyth wasn't stupid or air headed like other girls Yoyo had met. She was intelligent and had a good heart for others, not just for herself. She was innocent at times, and blameworthy at others. She was honest about how she felt and didn't leave him guessing for anything and this was what he liked about her, aside from her unique beauty.

Yoyo slid down and sat on the ground, looking out at the street while he thought about her. A sudden bang of a trashcan woke him and he jumped to his feet, ready. He stared at the other as the other stared at him with the same expression.

" *Timber* ?!"

" *Yoshi* ?!"

They both called out at once, cutting each other off. The dark haired boy glared at Yoyo with hatred in his gray eyes, "What are you doing back here?" Yoyo glanced down, hands in his pockets and didn't answer. "Oh, I see. You're too good for us anymore. Can't deal with living with different people every two weeks because they just send you right back to us, huh? Depending on the streets now? Think

you'll find a better life out there, Yoshi?" the teen snarled, letting his fury take a hold of him.

"I chose this life, Timber. My decision, my doing, my achieving, yo. Nothin's gonna stop me from doing what I want, not even you. But… I understand why you hate me, so hate me if you want, but it's not gonna change anything."

"Yoshi, you were the oldest! You knew how to deal with everything, and…I can't handle that stress. I don't know how to treat life anymore. You were like my brother, and it's like you're dead now."

Yoyo crossed his arms in a snort, "Oh, so I was a crutch?" Wolfgang gave him a cold stare, "You were like the parent. The parent who's there one day and abandons the next." Yoyo opened his mouth to defend himself, but a fourteen year old girl with black hair, green eyes, and dressed in a baggy jersey with jean shorts and sneakers came out with a five year old girl with light short brown hair and amber eyes, holding a dolly and dressed in a pink jumper dress. "Timber, Mary said to go to the store to get…" she stopped quietly after seeing Yoyo, but the little girl snatched her hand from the older one and ran for him happily.

"Yoshi!" she giggled, wrapping her arms around his neck as he kneeled with his arms open. "Hey Kuki, how've you been?" he asked as if he were an uncle of some kind. "Oh, look. It's the jerk." the older girl said flatly, but the younger one answered, "I growed a whole lot! Like to the sky!" Yoyo grinned, "No! You're joking!" The girl giggled some more, "No really! Look!" She stood up straight and Yoyo pouted, "Aw, you're right. You win." She hugged him again, "Where did you go? You left and didn't come back forever!" He picked up Kuki and faced the other two who were giving him grim stares.

"I was going to my new home." he answered, more to the others than to her. Kuki was thrilled, "You got a home now?! Yay!" The older girl snorted as Yoyo put Kuki down, "Yay? Aren't you sad that you'll never see Yoshi again?" Yoyo tilted his head, "What's that? Trying to guilt suck a five year old? That's low even for you, Mackenzie." She glared at him, "Shut up, dipshit." Yoyo's usual taunting expression was replaced by a dark one, "Talk like that in

front of Kuki again and I'll make you eat those words."

Mackenzie clenched her teeth as Kuki covered her ears, hating arguments, "Look you little-"

"Mickey, shut up already."

The two looked at Wolfgang, who had been standing quietly the whole time. He bent down and took Kuki's hands from her ears, "Will you miss Yoshi?" Yoyo looked at the small child sadly and sighed. She nodded, "I'll miss him. I'll miss him a whole lot!" Mackenzie crossed her arms with a dangerous attitude. "But…" the girl added, "I know he'll be happier with his new home, so I'm not sad he's leaving!" Mackenzie nodded, but shook her head, " *What* ?"

Kuki smiled, taking Yoyo's hand, "Yoshi told me one time that when he finds his home, good things will happen, and he told the truth! He found a home and some girls brought puppies for everyone! Good things are happening!" Yoyo looked at her with a soft smile, but Wolfgang stared at him, "You know those girls, don't you?" Yoyo nodded, "Yeah, they're my friends. We got those dogs straight from the shop, so they're good animals. Hey, I gotta watch out for the little people, right?" Wolfgang looked at the ground with a thought face on while Mackenzie snubbed Yoyo, "You don't surprise me one bit, Yoshiharu. Not since the day you stepped into the orphanage, always getting others in trouble, everyone accepting you, always looking for the hard way to do things. You're so predictable. And now you're hanging out with two skanky looking girls…"

Yoyo marched up to her face, ice in his breath, "One more comment about my friends and I swear I'll break your teeth in." She kept quiet about them, but she commented about him, "Always cruel and heartless, aren't we?" He heaved mockingly, "Heh! Finally seeing your reflection are you?" She growled at him, pushing him backwards, "I only treat you that way because you treat me that way!"

"Yeah? And who started it? Who always starts it?"

She glared at him, fire in her eyes, but it cooled off with some weakness he had somehow triggered. "You wouldn't understand…"

she hissed, slamming the door as she went back inside. Yoyo froze in alarm, but Wolfgang shook his head, "She won't say anything about you being here. Trust me." Kuki, who had been hiding behind Yoyo, peeked out and looked up at him, "Mickey is sad."

"No kidding." breathed Yoyo, but Kuki continued, "She doesn't want you to go to your new home. She wants you to stay here!" she danced, her light attention span wearing off. Yoyo glanced at Wolfgang, who gave a slight disgusted nod. Yoyo did the math in his head and groaned, "Ewww! You don't mean she…me?…aw ewww!" Wolfgang sighed and shrugged, "Kuki, should we keep Yoyo? Or let him go?" Yoyo glanced at her as she tugged his arm and he bent down. She hugged him as if he were her big brother, "I'll miss you, Yoshi. Will you visit?"

"I don't know if I can, but you'll see me all the time in the paper. And good things will always happen." he grinned, hugging her back. Wolfgang nodded, "So I guess this is it, huh?" Yoyo nodded, "Yeah…so…you still mad?"

"Hey, I'm always mad at you."

Yoyo smiled and they shook hands, maybe the last time they would see each other. Yoyo glanced out the alleyway, the girls were coming out. "Hey, Kuki?" he called and she came over. He kneeled and held her chin up, "You gotta promise me you'll never tell anyone I came to visit today, alright?" She nodded, tears welling up in her eyes and Yoyo felt a crack in his chest. He gave her another hug and stood, giving her to Wolfgang. "So what's the new name?" he asked, taking the girl.

"Yoyo."

"Hm…inventive." the other chuckled, "Well, then, see ya around, Yoyo."

"Catch ya, Timber Wolf." Yoyo waved, smiling, "Bye Kuki! And say bye to everyone else for me." She nodded as he skated back to the two other girls skating. He carried Gum's helmet and handed it to her when he caught up. Rhyth tilted her head oddly and his eyes widened, "Knew I forgot something!"

"Yoshi!"

Yoyo turned around with the other two to see Kuki run after them. She stopped, her little chest heaving, and looked up at the only one she knew from the bunch, "You forgotten your earmuffs!" she announced, holding up Rhyth's headphones and Yoyo chuckled, "Thanks Kuki." He took them and handed them to Rhyth, "Now you gotta remember to listen to Timber, okay? Listen to him as if he were me, now he's the big brother." Kuki's eyes went into confusion, "But…you're the big brother." He shook his head, "Not anymore… now its Timber's turn." Kuki sighed and nodded, "Okay…"

He turned her around and gave her a playful push, "Now, I think there's some puppies in there that wanna play with you!" Kuki giggled and nodded, skipping back to the building and waving, "Bye Yoshi! I love you!" Yoyo smiled softly as she disappeared into the building and sighed, "I'm gonna miss you most of all, kid…"

Author's Note: *Erm, long wait much? Sorry, just taken over by Gorillaz-ness…ness. XD*

Down Time

Down Time

The cool apartment was as silent as it had been the day before Beat had brought a stranger into his home that ruined his average lifestyle. Right now he was in the bathroom still, but washing his shirt and pants. He was in his boxers as he scrubbed his clothing clean. The quiet was so welcoming and calm, just as he liked it. A small smile appeared on the boy's face, feeling quite normal again.

But one way or another, he found himself wondering about Gum and an expansion of his plans. Every time the girl would pop in his mind, he only shook his head, trying to think of something else, and his mind would go blank for about two minutes until it happened again. "What the hell is this…" he mumbled, "I'm thinkin' about her when I hate her and it's her fault I have to be extra careful. She's always against me, but I stand up for her anyway…."

He sighed as he lifted his shirt from the sink, this creating a waterfall as the access water leaked out. "And everything's got me talking to myself…" he muttered with a chuckle. He thought about what she said when he wouldn't take the medicine and when they first met. All because of Yoyo. Yoyo was another story. He brought trouble with him no matter where he went, no matter what he did. Beat rung the shirt out and hung it up, "Maybe he's just plain bad luck." A sudden thought entered in. If it weren't for Yoyo, Beat wouldn't have met Gum, not that that was a good thing or anything…or was it?

Beat scrunched his face in thought. Now that these people came into his life, he couldn't seem to get rid of them. Trouble…that was the last thing Beat wanted until he was ready for it. He was for plans and timing. The others were blind faith jumpers. And Rhyth proved herself the night before. She had convinced Yoyo to help her release animals from a store that sold them. Shaking his head with a grim expression, Beat started soaking his pants. That would be a problem if it continued that way. Rhyth had Yoyo hypnotized without even knowing. Or without seeming like she knew.

Maybe she felt something for Yoyo, but it was bad news either way. Beat could tell Yoyo was after her the day they rescued the girls from the jail by the look he was giving her. And he always became defensive when it came to jealousy over Rhyth. She seemed to like the attention and Beat knew they were somehow shyly and secretly giving each other signs of affection. Not that Beat really cared, but if Yoyo wanted to become a rudie, he would need to focus on the rules of the street instead of the rules of love.

In Beat's opinion, love was a crazy foul up in life that just delayed major dreams. There were only two things you could have a deep connecting love with and that was one's own self and their families. Of course there were religions, but Beat didn't consider that mortal love. It was…diverse love. Mortal love screwed up everything in the end, forcing you to do things you would never do in your right mind and changing your view of life.

Beat never looked at love as a positive thing in life, since he hadn't allowed himself to love anyone besides himself in a long time. He had warned Yoyo about it, but Yoyo seemed to ignore this since he was already allowing himself to fall to a girl's command. But strangely, Beat was beginning to feel the very starting points of caring for others, which he didn't like too much. This thought led to Gum and so the chain reaction continued.

Then there was getting Hayashi. Since he now had a load to carry, Beat's plans would be weighed down and would be harder to achieve. Beat wanted to do this alone, to claim all the credit for himself to avenge his parents' deaths, but if he started his payback, the others would want to help, especially Yoyo, which Beat couldn't allow. He wasn't sure where to go with this now because of the delay. He wouldn't let himself forget his promise, but how to accomplish it, he didn't know. He had sworn to do it by himself, but…

Beat hung his pants up and rested on the couch, staring at the ceiling. The thoughts he used to get when he was alone weren't coming to him anymore since he had friends to chase them away. He felt bored with nothing to do when if he had been alone, really alone, he would've thought of something by now. He had never been bored when he was living on his own, but he sort of missed the

noise that bothered him constantly when the others were around. It only took a couple of days with others to break his usual routine of loneliness.

He reached under the couch for his headphones and put them on. Turning the dial, he switched to Jet Set Radio, hearing DJ Professor K announcing, " *Alright all you juvenile delinquents, this is the inventor of hooky playing wrong doers, DJ Professor K, baby! Bringing you the news from the lowest of the low and home sweet home, this is Jet Set Radio!* "

Beat smirked, feeling a sense of relative hominess, and crossed his arms behind his head.

" *New update: Gum, who I've already said broke out of jail with the help of some unknown cool dudes, is being hunted after by Poison Jam. Word is, is that one of the guys who helped her out got into some kinda fight with them, scarring himself with their own mark. Now since they're pissed off and probably scared of what the master'll do to them, they're after the guys who are hanging with Gum these days and Gum herself. I can tell you right now, it ain't gonna be no happy party when they're through with that! Haha!* "

Beat closed his eyes with frustration as the words flowed through his head.

" *But hey! It looks like Gum has a man who's willin' to stand between a Poison Jam member and her! Dude, have I got respect for you! Anyone who's willing to take a step in front of them, look them in the face, and smell their breath has got to be one strong guy! Odd though, Gum ain't the type to let a guy do her work. I'm pretty sure she'll have another one by next week!* " DJ K mocked, and Beat's cheeks went red with anger and dejection.

He had totally forgotten about Gum's reputation. Beat glared up, feeling extremely stupid with himself for even dreaming that Gum would ever be serious about him, even if it was just an itsy bitsy feeling. Gum lured guys to mug them, she was known for being a flirt when she needed to be. If DJ K knew it, then it had to be true.

" *I also heard that some rich girl who was bunking with Gum when*

she got caught also escaped, possibly with Gum. Now, that's strange, a rich girl runnin' from her parents when she's got a fortune to go home to, but the really messed up part is that daddy's not too happy with the way Hayashi's been runnin' things. Supposedly he was supposed to keep the girl in prison until daddy came to pick her up, but when he came, she was gone. Now Hayashi's tearin' up the streets, goin' after anyone who might've seen her, heard from her, or talked to her. I can only imagine what'll happen when she's found! "

Beat arched an eyebrow. It was weird hearing news he knew inside information about.

" *And this is a shout out for Gum if you're hearin' this. Yo' boy Corn is lookin' for ya, he'll be in Tokyo for a while. Can't say where, and I don't blame him! Ha!* "

Beat opened his eyes since they had begun to droop, "Corn? Who's Corn?" Could he be an old boyfriend? Or…still her boyfriend? Beat pondered on this while DJ K played Sweet Soul Brother, the music hour had begun.

The sky began to get cloudy, and the three skating back to the apartment hoped it would rain, but not on them. Hopefully, they would have enough time to get back home before the downpour came. Yet something was different about them. Especially one of them. Rhyth hadn't said a word since they had left the orphanage, and this worried Yoyo. Was she feeling well? What was bothering her? Did he do something wrong?

Gum also noticed the change in Rhyth, but knew better than to bother a girl when she was thinking. Yoyo obviously didn't apply to this rule as he poked her arm playfully and grinned, "What's the matter?" Rhyth gave him a cold look and stared ahead, arms wrapped around herself. Yoyo paused for a moment, glancing at Gum, "What did I do?" Gum shrugged, "Ask her later."

Gum checked the time, shocked. It was almost four. They had spent almost the whole day wandering about. " *I wonder how Beat's doing…* " she thought, a small smile lightening her face. He was

probably still sore about the dogs, but now they were gone and there was nothing to worry about. Except for them, of course. She sighed slightly. Sadly, she was finding herself thinking about Beat in off moments, wondering if he was doing the same thing as she. She led the other two, who were also acting strangely and made a sharp turn.

Yoyo was feeling a bit odd and embarrassed. Rhyth was shunning him and avoiding him without purpose. Or perhaps she did have one, but she wasn't letting him in on it. He glanced at her, but she stared straight ahead, ignoring him. Yoyo glanced around, wondering what he had done to insult her. He couldn't come up with anything at all. Maybe he looked at her the wrong way? He would never do that deliberately. He gave her a sad puppy look and kept quiet for the rest of the way back, feeling extremely left out.

Beat lifted his shirt which was filled with wrinkles and pressed them out with the side of his skate, lightly pressing on the turbo button located on the side. This was his form of drying and ironing. Make due with what he had was his life. This was delicate work, though, since he was messing with fire and clothing, and with every moment he begged the Lord above that any of the others wouldn't bang on the door and startle him, since he was so focused on his work.

The last thing he needed was his shirt to go aflame and the entire building go with it. He sighed a nervous breath and held it out, turning it over to do the back. He began his routine and was nearly done when something banged against the front door, causing him to almost drop his skate. Glaring at the door, he quickly put on his pants that he had dried and looped in the belt, heading to the door.

He opened the door vigorously, "Can't you guys…"

Looking from side to side, Beat saw that no one was there. His anger left him in confusion, "What was that?" He shrugged and closed the door. He lifted his shirt and skate, about to iron again, when another bang interrupted him. He glanced at the door oddly and continued with his work. The next distraction caught Beat off guard as whatever was outside began scratching at his door with a

howl.

"What…?" Beat muttered, mystified, opening the door once again. No one was there, but something brushed past his legs, dropping a large metal object on his bare foot. "OW!" he yelled, curing as he held his foot and slammed the door. He glared down, realizing it was a giant pot with a chewed handle. "What the hell is this?" Beat mumbled, kicking it. It scraped against the floor to the corner of the room, and continued on, on its own.

Beat stared as the pot stopped suddenly and began to shake. He went over to it curiously and lifted it. Underneath was one of the dogs Yoyo and Rhyth had brought, wagging its tail thankfully for Beat's help. "What are you doing here?" Beat asked it spitefully, as if it was going to answer him. The dog barked and sniffed Beat's feet, licking them. "Ugh, get away from me you stupid thing!" he hissed, and the dog growled at him.

"Barkin' at me, huh?" Beat said evilly, lifting the dog and placing it in the pot, "Now shut up!" The dog stayed quiet, not used to actually being inside the pot, and began to chew the handle from where he was. Beat finished up ironing his shirt and put it on, slipping on his socks and strapping his skates. He checked the bathroom, noticing he needed a few things since everyone was depending on his items. Sighing, he went to the door and the dog began whining, wanting to go along.

Beat arched an eyebrow, "Wait, why am I leaving you here when you're just gonna destroy the little bit of ownership I have over things?" Beat lifted the dog from the pot and held him under his arm, reaching for the door, "Sorry, but you gotta go." He opened the door, stopping suddenly to three teens. Gum stared, "How did…we took that one!"

Yoyo tilted his head, "Hey! It's that spotty one!" The dog greeted him by licking his cheek in one try. Yoyo wiped his face with the back of his hand grimly, "Aww…" Rhyth smiled and held her arms out, taking the dog, "Were you going to take him for a walk, Beat?" Beat looked at her and answered flatly, "Oh yeah, just him and me…"

Author's Note: *'nother chapter. Nah! Review, because!*

Getting Kicked Out

Getting Kicked Out

Author's Note : *Holy Christ...just wow. I haven't updated this sucker in YEARS. Funny thing about it is that I had this fully written chapter in a jump drive that I've always had. It was a reviewer who recently reviewed about this story that jerked my memory of this fic and had me wondering where exactly was the rest of the story. I think I have another chapter somewhere in the memory of that drive, so I shall look for it. I wrote this oh, I don't know...three years ago, when the rest of the story was being written. That was back when I was sixteen. Sadly, I find my writing a bit crappy when it came to the description department. I still enjoy the storyline, which is fully clear in my head. Since classes will end in less than 2 weeks, I have a good feeling that any readers who are still reading this will actually have a finished story. I apologize to anyone whose been waiting up on this...better late than never, so I've heard, but this was kind of ridiculous. I feel a burning desire to end this puppy, seeing as the story is a good portion of the way over. However, there's still one scene I haven't written that's quite important to the story...I'll be more than happy to exercise my more developed writing skills on it for thy reading pleasure. As for this chapter, and the next most like, I wrote them back three years ago, so sue me if the writing's a little shoddy. –shrug- I did do an hour edit, skimming through the chapter and rearranging certain sentences that didn't make sense, as well as correcting spelling mistakes that word grammar check didn't catch. I like to keep the originality of my past self in here for the most part. I'm sure you'll be able to tell what chapter is truly newly written to this date when it's uploaded eventually. Oh well. For now, enjoy a chapter from 2006.*

PS. I noticed this is the first story I had ever mentioned my love for Gorillaz in. For those who care (which most probably don't), I developed into a dangerously dedicated fan, owning clothing, figures, cds, their autobiography, dvds, and such. It's interesting to see what I was and what I've become. A worse better me. :D

"How did he get back here?" asked Rhyth, pushing her way back into the apartment. "How should I know? Obviously, you guys can't even watch a little mutt without losing track." Beat snuffed, crossing his arms as he closed the door. He stood by it, though; he was still going to leave.

"Hey, five dogs, a bunch of kids, Yoyo having his little goodbyes, and us making it back here without getting caught, might distract us *just* enough to lose track of one little measly dog!" said Gum coldly, sitting. During the mid of this sentence, Rhyth threw Yoyo a chilling look that made him blush with fear. She was acting very strange; he would have to talk with her later, like Gum said.

"Yeah, well, whatever…" grumbled Beat, opening the door. Gum arched an eyebrow, "And where are you going?" Beat glared at her, "Not that its any of your freakin' business, but we're running low on stuff thanks to you guys so I'm gunna stock up." Gum lifted herself slowly, "I'm going with you. I need some stuff." Beat threw her an icy look, "No, you're not. One person is enough to give suspicion, two just gives it away."

Gum pushed passed him, "Junior, I've been in this for years, you think I don't know how to jack a few things from shelves? Besides, would *you* rather fill your bags with makeup and other feminine products?" Beat sighed darkly and skated passed Gum, "Did I ever tell you how much I hate you?" Gum pouted in thought, "You've told me once, but not how much. Amuse me." she sneered, turning the corner of the alley with him.

The spotted dog in Rhyth's arms shot off, startling the two. "No! Wait! Puppy! Come back!" Rhyth cried, chasing after him. Yoyo decided to follow her, closing the door behind him. Soon enough, they lost his trail, and Rhyth kept quiet, feeling she had let the dog down by not keeping him safe and finding him a decent home. The empty streets were clear enough to skate freely in, but Rhyth kept to the sidewalks, staring at the ground. Yoyo stuffed his hands in his pockets and tilted his head, "Don't worry Rhyth, I'm sure the little guy's fine! Probably lookin' around for the perfect home."

Rhyth glared at him and he raised his hands, "What did I do?"

She didn't answer him, but ignored him, wondering where the poor creature was. Mysterious thoughts traveled in her mind as she sighed, hugging herself. Yoyo looked to the side, rubbing his elbow, "Maybe we should…split up…?" Perhaps a little time from each other would cool down the grudge she was holding against him. It wasn't *his* fault the dog got away. Rhyth nodded and took off, almost happy he had suggested the idea. Yoyo stood for a pitiful moment, then went off on his own, wondering what he could do to make everything better.

After hitting their first store, the anger and frustration between the two teenagers seemed to mellow down a bit. But, only a little. While the two carried bags on their backs, each filled with various items, DJ K's announcements rewound in Beat's mind. He glanced at Gum slowly, the important news flowing through his mind as if he were listening to it at the moment, and shook his head. Gum was looking around for the next store, she needed her own toothbrush, and she might as well pick some up for the others, some nail polish, and conditioner, since Beat only had shampoo.

Boys could be so uncaring about their looks in her opinion. On the other hand, Beat did take pretty good care of himself. He smelled good, his clothes were always clean, his hair was healthy and he kept his own style constantly, and his mouth was clean, aside from some occasional words every once in a while. Gum rolled her eyes as she silently told herself she could give him a better score than what she had before. " *Alright, alright, an eight… maybe a nine, but that's it!* " she thought, too caught up in her thoughts to realize where she was going.

She bumped into Beat, who had gone ahead of her and stopped suddenly. "What?" she asked, pushing him out of her way. Beat stared straight ahead, and with his goggles covering half his face, she couldn't really tell his expression, but his mouth was stern and serious, giving her somewhat of a clue. She slowly met his glance, groaning. "Do they ever give up?" Beat grumbled, skating backwards for a moment and spinning around. Gum quickly joining him, "Not for as long as I've known them." she sighed, escaping the reach of two sea reeking gargoyles.

Beneath the cloudy gray sky, Rhyth skated around, calling hopelessly for her lost puppy. Not technically hers, but in her heart he belonged to her at least until she found a home for him. However, this wasn't the only sadness she felt within her caring soul. She was also filled with disappointment. She hadn't been sure how to bring about her feelings, her confusion, to Yoyo, but she just wasn't ready to talk about the past he had abandoned. The past that had depended on him. That looked up to his advice.

He had left friends so much younger than him...the few that were around his age, bitter with his absence. Who could blame them? He was family, disappearing to never return. The small girl, innocence blooming in her large blue eyes, had told the story to Rhyth. Though the child was young, she was quite bright concerning the events that had taken place; Rhyth couldn't help but share the pain that those children felt about Yoyo going off and leaving them helpless.

She sighed as she recalled the way the older boy, Wolfgang, had reacted to them when they came. Not very welcoming at all. The tiny child had explained that Yoyo had been his only friend. He had left him all alone one night, and hadn't come back since. Rhyth tilted her head, " *Okay, I left my family, but they don't care about me. They only care about the money I ensure for them. But he left…a somewhat family…and they cared about him…I just thought he had more heart than that…to disappear…leave them all confused…* "

She glanced into an alleyway and crept in. "It's none of my business really…" she whispered, wiping a few tears that had accumulated around her eyes, "But…maybe I was wrong about him…" Feeling this way broke Rhyth's heart, she hadn't even given him a chance to explain. But why was she feeling like this? She hadn't known him for very long, only a few days, yet it felt like she'd known him forever, and he wasn't her boyfriend or anything, not that she wouldn't particularly mind the idea, but this feeling was almost as bad as a cheated heart.

He had promised he would never lie to her, and honestly he hadn't, but he had left some major facts out, which was nearly the same thing. She crossed her arms and shook her head, sniffing. A sudden

coolness fell over her, irking her curiosity. Slowly glancing up, she opened her mouth, holding a short greeting with suspicion that it was the green haired teen. Her eyes widened with fear and she backed against the brick wall, her mouth open, but throat so dry words couldn't come out. She froze as the oncoming giant raised his arm with a malicious grin plastered across his face.

Even though it was cloudy, the sun's heat still sank through. The warmth began to get to the short sixteen year old as he called out for a dog that didn't even have its own name. With no luck, he began to recite stereotypical names usually reserved for canines. "Spot! Ren! Kyo! Akira! Buddy!..."

Yoyo growled as he glanced up, shading his eyes from what his sunglasses couldn't protect. "Stupid dog…I bet you're the reason Rhyth's so pissed with me, yo…" He sighed, shooting into an alleyway to get out of the heat. "Me and heat do not go together, yo!" he exhaled weakly, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. His gloves were making the palms of his hands itch already.

Yoyo began to whistle, "Here, boy! C'mon…" Yoyo shook his head, knowing without a name, they would never find him. "I need somethin' to drink, yo." he muttered, wondering how the others were doing. He glanced down at his hood, knowing this was part of the ridiculous reason he would get so hot so quickly, but he didn't care. He would never abandon his faithful hood. He scratched his neck and skated out of the cooling shade, only to face the heat again.

Way down, at the end of the block, he could make out a vender, a hotdog vender to be precise, his umbrella up, ready to serve. "They've gotta have some water or something…" Yoyo swallowed, reaching into his pocket for the extra money he had forgotten to return to Gum. As he skated over, he noticed the chubby man was angrily swatting at something behind the cart. Whatever it was, it was distracting the vender from Yoyo as he skated up.

"You sell bottled water?" he asked, but the man only fumed, "Back off, beast! I said away with you!"

The drained teen arched an eyebrow, glancing over the pushcart for a peek in his curiosity. Growing with his teeth bared, the little white dog he had been searching for paced back and forth, nearly glaring at this seller. He continually pawed the cart with a whine, smelling the delicious meat teasing his sensitive nose. "Hey, there you are!" grinned Yoyo, and the dog glanced at him, wagging its tail immediately. He jumped into Yoyo's arms as the juvenile half kneeled, receiving a bath of puppy kisses. The vender, stressed and ready to hunt down the little creature, glared at Yoyo, "That your dog?"

Yoyo smiled, "Actually, my friend's. He kinda ran off for no reason." The vender snapped, slapping the top tray of the cart, "No reason? He's *hungry* kid! He's addicted to meat like a druggie! I give him one little hotdog, *one little hot dog* , and he goes *ballistic* on me, almost foaming at the mouth! Ever seen a pothead when they need their fix?" Yoyo snorted a laugh, and held onto the cart for support. The vender's infuriation was hilarious; he really had a way with words. "You're a pot brownie meat dog, yo!" he grinned and the dog wagged its tail, having no idea what Yoyo was talking about.

"Here's your water. Now get that thing away from me and tell your friend to *feed* that animal." the vender growled, shoving the bottle at Yoyo. Drinking the water greedily, the shortest of the team placed the dog down, receiving a pitiful, longing stare. Arching a brow, the refreshed teen glanced at him and smiled, "I'm not forgetting about you." He squatted down and poured some water lightly, enough that the dog could catch it by lapping it in the air. Yoyo lifted the bottle upright again and the dog licked around its mouth, finishing with its nose.

Yoyo sighed and looked around. "I guess we better find Rhyth, eh, Pottsy?" The dog barked and hung his tongue out, panting happily. Chuckling at the joke once more, the young delinquent led the way.

Beat and Gum flung themselves into an alleyway as the two Poison Jammers sped by, each thinking they were still hot on their trail. "Oh, yeah, did I forget to mention they're after *me* for helping *you* ?" Beat snapped irritably, giving Gum a stern look. "Your own fault for

butting in. I can take care of myself." she replied with a snort, dashing out with Beat right behind her.

"Yeah, I'm sure you could've handled that punch just as well as I did, right?" he mocked, trying to outrun her. "Yeah, well, no one would've cared if I could or couldn't! Most guys wouldn't give a shit!" she jeered, glaring at him. "Well, I'm not most guys!" Beat hissed, suddenly halting at the confusion of his own words. Gum also slowed, throwing him a puzzled, bemused expression, also trying to figure out what he had just said.

What *had* he just said? In the few seconds they stood, Beat winced, wondering what had made him say that. What point was he exactly trying to prove by answering like that? The opposite of Gum's statement would mean that he *did* care about her, completely throwing off every moment they had together. Gum tilted her head, feeling slightly awkward inside, and yet, also nervous and excited. A true feeling she hadn't had in a long time. The five second flash was cut off instantly by an obnoxious grunt. "There they are!" growled Jason, dashing after them.

Gum grabbed Beat's arm, "C'mon! We've gotta get outta here! They're gunna attract the police!" Agreeing, Beat followed her step, heading off to the best place they could think up, the apartment. But first, they'd have to lose these goons.

"Alright, pup. I found you…now…I lost Rhyth…" Yoyo said awkwardly, rubbing the side of his neck as he looked to his left and right. The dog sat, sharing the boy's eyed directions. Tossing the empty bottle he had and continuing on, the runaway slowed his pace, sinking his hands into the depths of his pockets. "She was… kinda mad at me earlier. I'm not sure if it was from you getting lost exactly...I don't think it is...entirely, anyway...I mean, she was mad *before* we lost you, so…" He hung his head into his hood slightly and the dog bobbed his, as if understanding what Yoyo was going through.

Yoyo lightly blushed and grinned, looking at the pup, "Hey…you won't go off and tell her how I feel, right little man?" The dog barked

and wagged his tail excitedly for the one on one attention while Yoyo sighed with a small smile, "Least I got a friend who I can trust with secrets." He began to skate around again, "You don't seem the type who would betray me in a stupid little fight over a girl…right?" he chuckled, realizing he was talking to a dog, but he quickly shrugged it off, kneeling down with a pat to the canine's head, "I know she cares for you way more than she does for me, yo, but...maybe you can help me out here."

From playfully bouncing around, the dog stiffened and sniffed the air, suddenly alarmed. Yoyo arched an eyebrow, slowly getting to his feet with his eyes darting around him, "What's up, boy?" he whispered firmly. The dog bounded off across the street with Yoyo right behind him. "Hey! Wait a minute, yo! Get back here!" Dashing into an alleyway, he led Yoyo to a corner, suddenly pausing with a slight growl. Yoyo fanned himself, wiping some sweat from the run, "What's…wrong…with…"

"Don't look so scared, cutie. I ain't gunna hurt you."

Yoyo froze, backing against the wall with a thoughtful expression. Just by the awful stench in the air he could tell who it was, even the dog knew it meant trouble, but…who was this guy talking to?

"...You...won't?"

Yoyo's eyes widened as he peeked around the corner slightly catch a glimpse. Rhyth was relaxing her terrified position against the wall with a relieved sigh as the Poison Jammer shadowed her with his intensity, wearing an outsized grin of interest. Clenching his teeth, the green haired youngster held back from any action on his part. His reasons were thusly preset: he was curious of what this pinhead had to say, since it didn't look like he was about to take off anytime soon, and, if he so happened to pop in and anger this beast, the chances of Yoyo coming out of the brawl alive was slim to none. With his luck, this would be the one that he had pissed off the other day and, in all honesty, he wasn't in any condition to fight with his heat exhaustion and all...

His four legged friend slightly growled again as he glared at the Poison Jammer, but the teen glanced at him, quickly giving him a

reassuring pat, "Potts, shh…" Yoyo scrunched his face with thoughtful discovery. He had just called the dog 'Potts'. Smiling slowly, he decided he liked the name, and it would be his own personal joke forever. "Potts…good boy…" he whispered, making sure he wasn't noticed, and the dog quieted down, still sniffing the air.

"So…what do you want?" asked Rhyth on the other side of the alleyway, still unsure about this guy. Sure, he *said* he wasn't going to do anything, but she couldn't trust anyone. If he was willing to try something, she could at least race out of there, and hopefully run into Beat or Yoyo who had more of a chance taking him down than she ever could. The Poison Jammer crossed his arms and shook his head, looking at the ground, "Why does everyone automatically think we want something when we stop someone?" Rhyth tilted her head, "Because you're a gang member! When someone from a gang stops another, it's because of something they want!"

The Poison Jammer shook his head caringly, "No, baby! I just wanted to *talk* to you. You know, like person to person. When I looked into your eyes, you unlocked a part of me that hasn't been around in a long time…" Yoyo glared at the Poison Jammer with gagged tongue, "I'm sure…" he uttered under his breath, hanging on to Potts so he wouldn't go off after the stinking teen. Rhyth smiled slightly and the Poison Jammer grinned, "Now, that's a ray of beautified sunshine right there. But, why were you all sad before? I saw you before we bumped into each other."

Rhyth blushed slightly and sighed, "Oh…I was…thinking about my friend." The Jammer snorted, "It wouldn't happen to be the twerp that knocked me down before, would it?" Yoyo squeezed Potts close to his chest, the dog in reply licking his cheek, but Yoyo's heart was pacing faster than ever. This *was* the member he had fought off from Rhyth. He would definitely have something against the green haired rudie and if this fool was interested in Rhyth, which he *was* , he would use *any* excuse to get Rhyth to turn on him.

Rhyth sniffed and crossed her arms behind her, nodding shyly. Yoyo's throat went dry as his jaw stiffened, feeling guilty. But what had he done? Mind racing through all they had said to one another, he couldn't pick off one little thing that could have offended her. If

anything, he had given his all to be a good friend. "Did that jerk hurt you, baby? You just tell me the word and I'll get him for you." preached the large teen, but Rhyth only shook her head, "No, he didn't hurt me. Well…not…forwardly…and besides, he's kinda busy looking for this puppy we lost. He wouldn't have time for you to find him," she said with an innocent smile.

"Well, what did he do to bother you so much?"

"Uhm...well...he…sort of lied to me…"

"That's worse than betraying your group." said the Poison Jammer, shaking his head and crossing his arms to make himself sound oh so holy. " *I lied to her?* " thought Yoyo, scratching Potts with nervous twitches behind the ears, but the dog didn't mind. He was getting much wanted attention. Rhyth shrugged, holding her wrist behind her, "Well, I haven't really discussed it with him yet. I'm kind of nervous about talking to him about it." she said quietly. The Poison Jammer smiled and lifted her hand, "Then you shouldn't. Nothin' as beautiful as you should ever have to worry about anythin'. And I know a beautiful girl like yourself got a name to match, right?"

Rhyth blushed and giggled, "Its Rhyth." The Poison Jammer grinned, "I'm lovin' it. You know, Rhyth, we should hang out sometime." Yoyo's face paled as he backed away from the scene, still close enough to eavesdrop. He was silently cursing himself for his unknown foolishness. His eyes gazed down, half closed, lightly breathing as the words entered his mind in a painfully bubbly tone, "Yeah, we should!"

Yoyo glanced at Potts and sighed, skating out of the alleyway as unnoticeably as he had entered. There was no need for him there, or anywhere at this painful point, but he did have a shelter he could always curl up and waste away in. "C'mon, boy," he said, placing Potts down, "At least I got you around." The canine stopped wagging his tail and tilted his head in a confused manner, knowing something was wrong with his newly decided master, but of course, unable to communicate directly with him, he only followed Yoyo as he skated slowly down the street.

Still in the alleyway, Rhyth nodded with a smile, but the conversation

was interrupted by shouts of anger, "Poison Jam! We're outta here!" The Jammer looked out the alley closest to him and skated out, "I'll see you around, beautiful!" Rhyth waved, but realized she never got his name. He was too far by the time she skated out, but she only shrugged, "He's kinda cute."

She tapped her cheek in a quick thought and remembered why she was skating around before, and all the feelings and memories flooded back into her as if the little distraction had never happened. "*I wonder if Yoyo found him yet?*" she pondered, glancing at the sky. It was looking particularly grayer than earlier. Furrowing her brows, she knew she needed to hurry. Glancing around, she exited out the opposite alleyway where she had been unknowingly spied on only moments ago.

Beat froze as he saw the sight before him in plain view, taking refuge in a nearby corner. Gum rubbed her stomach, "Hey, I'm starting to get hungry and…oh shit…" She quieted down as Beat's expression went from the smug, conceited look of outwitting Poison Jam, to a dark and dangerous one as he glared out ahead. Gum wasn't exactly sure what to do in this situation. Never before had she experienced something like this.

Ahead of them, across the street and into the alleyway where Beat's apartment was, was yellow tape marking the door and about five police cars parked outside of the building. The apartment was infested with police, lingering around, completely infiltrating Beat's home. Walking around inside was none other than Captain Hayashi, pacing back and forth with his arms behind him. "Now what?" Beat hissed, wanting to take the man apart with his bare hands then and there.

Gum eyes didn't move from the alleyway, "We need to find Yoyo and Rhyth." Beat gave her an odd glare, wondering what made her think they weren't caught already. She glanced up without doubt, "Hayashi keeps his captives with him at all times. He pretty much holds their hands all the way to jail. The cars are empty and Hayashi's going through a piss fit. He didn't catch anyone."

Beat fumed, punching the brick wall of the alleyway, wanting to scream all his fury out. First, this lunatic took his parents, then his future, now his home? What was left for the maniac to take? This man had stolen everything that had ever mattered to the teen. Not man... *demon* . There was *nothing* for the boy to obtain from life. Hayashi had left him with no purpose...except one...to destroy the chief as soon as possible...Oh, and what a victory it would be. Beat couldn't wait for that day. Gum watched him sadly as blood began dripping out of his gloves and down his arms, but he didn't care. He just continued to punch the bricks as hard as he could, taking deep breaths, almost gasps, from the pain.

But he would not cry.

Gum wondered this about the stonehearted redhead, wondered about his strengths and weaknesses, but no matter what, he would never cry. And...come to think of it...she had never seen him smile either, but all the pain, all the anger, he just wouldn't let it go. Gum sighed and shook her head, eventually pushing Beat away from his target and slapped him a few times to bring him back to his senses, "Knock it off! Do you actually think a wall and hating the world is gunna change anything? Will it stop Hayashi from being who he is? Will it stop you from bleeding by your hands? Stop being an idiot and think for once!" she snapped, shaking him.

He pushed her off in a dangerously susceptible manner, " *You're* the idiot! You'll *always* be the idiot! You don't know me! You don't know what's gone on...why I'm here! Why the hell shouldn't I hate the world when all it's been is *hell* to me?" A crack of thunder roared above, lighting up the alleyway, but Beat didn't care. He was blind with rage. "I was eight! Fucking eight years old! What world welcomes an eight-year-old boy whose parents were murdered by a police officer? Who would want a child that would have nightmares of his parents' deaths, who would need psychiatric therapy to help him along in life, who would always be *alone* no matter how much that person tried to make him *happy* ?"

Gum stared at him, finally listening to the horrendous story of his past. The clouds darkened to the blackest they could get and let out an enormous downpour on everything below. "Beat…" Gum said slowly, but he glared at her darkly, "Fuck you! There's nothing you

can say that would mean *anything* at this point." She stood tall, shaking her head, "I never *had* parents, Beat. You're *not* the only one in this world who feels that way. I know what its like to be alone." His fists curled up in a rampaging fury. How *dare* she try to measure up to his pain and frustration?

"NO, YOU DON'T!" he hissed, taking a step towards her, "A person who's alone doesn't *smile* or make *friends* in a heartbeat! They don't welcome the world's daylight with open arms and a strong heart! They hide in the dark. Their memories appear day and night. They hold the hate that will forever haunt them until they die, and even then, they die alone. People like me don't have friends, there's no such thing as happiness, and they stay away from people like *you* ." he finished coldly, his body shivering in livid spasms.

Gum glared at him, and took a step closer as well, " *You* hate everything because you don't let anyone help you with your problems. The world doesn't hate *you* , Beat. Its you who hates the world. You lost trust in everything when you lost your parents, even yourself. Its not that no one's offered you help, it's that you don't *want* it. You're hanging on to the past and its only tearing you apart. I know to *you* I'll sound like a stupid bitch, but have you ever thought about actually *letting it go* ?"

Beat snarled, his body shaking with unleashing anger. What was her plan behind all this? Trying to make him feel weak? Beat never found comfort for his loss, but it had never really affected him until now. Until *she* came along.

Gum stared at him, face gray with dull emotion. Not a ray of happiness shown in her face, and her eyes, a bitter cold blue, like of an ocean during stormy weather. Both stared at each other, rain pouring down on them like bullets, and darkness in between, but Beat was in a far deeper darkness. The abyss he was drifting in was so cold, so black, so empty…his chest was unsure of what to feel any longer. The heart itself was deciding whether to allow this anger to consume it whole, or to be weak for a moment to listen.

Gum tilted her head slightly, looking into his eyes. The eyes of mystery that she could never solve. "Beat, *talk* to me….I'm willing to listen if you're willing to talk…but you can't be strong about it. Stop

being so damn stubborn and put your guard down for just a minute! I can't make you perfect, but I can help heal you…" Still swimming within the depth of his mind, an instant flashback shot through.

His parents walking down the street.

His father ruffling his hair.

His mother kissing his cheek.

…snagging away from her. He was too old for that kind of stuff.

Girls were gross, even if it *was* his mother.

His father laughing at his antics, pushing it forward a bit.

He had always been close to his father.

Beat's eyes shimmered a bit with such depression, it made the weather seem bright, and Gum frowned slightly. He shook his head, glaring at her with hatred, "WHY DON'T YOU LEAVE ME ALONE!" Gum jumped in shocked, but maintained her cool. Shoving his face hair's length to hers, Gum could only hold her position with internal fear as the boy's rage ate him entirely, "ALL YOU DO IS DIG UP OLD DIRT THAT FUCKS WITH MY HEAD! IT'S BEEN HAUNTING ME SINCE THE DAY IT HAPPENED! EVERY DAY! EVERY NIGHT! JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!"

" *Beat* ! Would you just-"

Everything seemed to freeze in place, from the police in view from the alleyway, searching through everything, to the rain falling slowly…slowly…slowly…from the sky to the ground as Beat blanked out momentarily unable to hold back anything anymore. In those few milliseconds of nothingness, he had subconsciously raised his right arm in a blindness of vehemence, shooting it forward and smashing his bloody knuckles in the center of Gum's face. A nauseating crack broke the silence in Beat's mind, and only when he saw her body falling backwards, her face covered in blood...did he snap back into reality. No longer was his mind playing tricks on his senses...the rain was falling heavily...the police were scattering like mice...

Droplets washed harder than ever, almost a blanket of thick, tangible rain painting everything white, Beat's hand pounding with another added wound, his heart pacing at an alarming rate for what he had just done, and the stare that Gum was giving him, sitting up slowly and touching her face. He held his hand as if to nursing it, backing away as Gum shakily got to her feet, but before she could scream his name, he was lost in soup of rain, leaving her alone.

Finding A Place To Stay

Finding a Place to Stay

"What the *fuck* , yo."

Skating on dry cement was hard enough, and Yoyo, being a self taught skater, deemed himself a decent one at that. He wasn't entirely proud of the fact that he had stolen the skates he now wore on his feet long ago from an older teen (he himself about twelve or so); however, the foster family who had taken him in never seemed to find the horrible bullying their son bestowed on the tiny child inappropriate…they barely noticed at all. And so with a swelled heart, the child believed he had only paid back his karma when he chose to nick the pair of shiny skates from the young man's closet, and then of course quickly sneak out and be on his way before anyone realized he was gone. It never occurred to him that his prize was much too large for his feet in his current state, but he assumed at some point he would grow into them and learn the trait. He wasn't about to give away or sell something as shiny as those skates.

He definitely had put them to quite the use, but in all honesty, he wasn't a pro skater…yet. Not in rain anyway. Or rain such as this. The sheets were blinding and slicked up the concrete…or pavement…he couldn't really tell the difference at this point. Had a monsoon randomly picked up without his knowing? No…there weren't any strong winds and streets weren't flooded...only his horrible luck to be literally swimming amongst the falling water, and while trying to balance with a twitchy, hidden pup, no less. Thunder had never been a choice friend for animals, and especially canines, with their highly keen hearing and innate knack for sensing it right before it would clap across the skies, anyone with such advanced features would simply go mad. Curling his head right under the teen's armpit, the young dog tensed up in the boy's grip, a broken whistle escaping his throat. Releasing an unexpected laugh, Yoyo glanced down the neck hole of his hood, rubbing his fingers along what he could reach within the dog's cradle, "T-That tickles! N'aww…not afraid of a little bad weather, are ya, bud?" he asked

tenderly, receiving a quick lick to the nose.

A sharp crack shot through the air, startling the teen for just a moment before he glanced down with a sheepish grin, "Caught me off guard, that's all." Potts merely sniffed and whined. Adjusting the sopping hood on his head, Yoyo skated a few feet before finally deciding his sliding sunglasses weren't doing him any good, aside from frustration and wasted time as he continually pushed them to their starting point, only to have them rush down his nose like a slide. Folding them up with a flick of the wrist, the boy pocketed them, squinting up to check any street signs for an idea of where he might be. He was positive he was at least nearby the apartment; things didn't look too foreign and landmarks were the best directions, but the rain was coming down so hard visibility on the signs was close to zero between the droplets racing down and the rushing waterfall on the signs themselves. "Damn rain's so thick I can barely see…"

The further he skated, the more familiar things began to get, which was considerably good news, granting he was going on bare knowledge of the area under hazardous conditions. Crunching his nose up as he leaned his neck out, he recognized the mounds of garbage bags, now soggy and rank from the weight of the rain, smiling in relief, "Alright, guy. We found it." Offering a very timid bark, the dog poked his nose out against Yoyo's neck, gentle little breaths flicking against the boy's skin. Bouncing the pup in his grip, the green haired teen quickened his pace, hoping he'd find something to dry up little Potts with. Beat wasn't exactly animal friendly, but Yoyo wasn't about to let the chill of the rain seep skin deep. Poor thing was shivering as he dug his head around the boy's chest, pausing for a moment before poking his nose out through the neck hole, only to cry in response with a slender growl.

He couldn't understand why a sudden pit developed in his stomach as soon as the dog changed paces, but something told the young rudie to keep an eye out for anything amiss. "What is it, boy?" he whispered, knowing perfectly well the dog couldn't very well answer him; however, it was better company than none at all, and although Potts couldn't reply in words, he could definitely offer a response. His growl remained low, digging his claws into Yoyo's chest to poke

his head out in order to see what the danger was.

"Yoshida, what's your position?"

The teen dodged into the closest alleyway, cradling the dog close as he pressed his back against the wall, holding his breath as the officer walked past without a glance, fiddling with his walkie talkie, "Outside the premises, sir. Just did a circular scout, but nothing. Seems like the roaches scattered."

Yoyo glared over his shoulder as his eye ticked, calming the lightly growling dog, though he couldn't help agree with the pup. Roaches were they? Well, all definitely knew how hard it was to get rid of them, or kill them for that matter. Rudies were going to be the worst vermin the government would ever have to deal with. They thought four teens were a problem…just wait…

" *Wait till we rise up* …" he mentally warned, hushing Potts as he poked the dog's nose to distract the scent of the officer. The cop took a few more steps, twisting the dial of his control while doing his best to balance the umbrella he had the privilege of carrying. The boy leaned out ever so slightly, peering at the officer's back, however his eyes trailed off past him, past the brightly lit cars, past the rank sagging bags of filth, to the alleyway… *their* alleyway… infested with the worst case of armature detectives, all snooping around in order to please the top dog. His jaw popped open, nearly dropping Potts in sheer shock from the horror. He swore his heart was skipping every other beat…and he was positive the rain truly wasn't nearly as bad as he professed it was. "No…" he managed to gasp out, refusing to accept the truth that if his friends were in there…

No.

They weren't in there. There was no way they could be. They were too good for that. Gum and Beat were professionals in dodging coppers, made it look like square one. There was no possible way either of them could've been caught off guard. Yoyo's mind wouldn't allow it. But Rhyth…she was new…like him…No…still no. He had left her behind. There wouldn't have been enough time for her to get to the apartment before him…not without passing him at least. He

swallowed roughly, squeezing the dog tight, and though he knew Potts was probably feeling quite uncomfortable, it was the only comfort *he* had. The pup whimpered once again, and Yoyo let up on his grip, but instead of calming down, the dog suddenly jumped, clawing at his master's chest. "O-Ow, Potts, what the—"

The boy was pulled backwards before he could finish, nearly losing his balance, but held off just enough to spin around with a fist up and ready, willing and ready to protect himself if need be (and of course, Potts as well). His entire body wavered as it virtually shut down on itself, knees buckling as he tried to keep a weak, sheepish grin on, "Oh, God…Gum, it's you." The taller blond owned an oddly vacant stare, one that lingered on the hand that had curled into a fist seconds ago. For a moment, neither said anything until Yoyo cleared his throat, peering out from their hiding spot, "What in the hell is goin' on out there…how'd they find ou—…Gum? Y-You're *bleeding* ."

The young woman snapped out of her gaze, quick to wipe her nose and rid the last of the evidence with the rain. She sniffed quietly, "It's nothing," but her eyes said more. Yoyo was one to easily read the hidden emotions of others, no matter how hard they tried, but Gum didn't seem to be trying to hide anything. In fact, her body was desperately trying to tell him all. "W-What…uhm…happened?" he asked quietly, soft…willing to defend her every need if necessary. She had protected him before and he wouldn't be quick to forget it. Whoever had dared to touch his friend had treaded into a danger zone. However, Gum shook her head lazily, so…unlike herself. She seemed to be moving too slow to be considered normal, and her expression…he had never seen such an expression before. To look positively emotionless…and yet…emotional. It was highly confusing. "Never mind that. You saw it out there for yourself. Hayashi found a rudie pad and it looks like he wants to bunk in." she said quietly, but loud enough to be heard over the rain. The two glanced delicately over the corner of the building they were hiding against, and Yoyo gave a dark sigh, still keeping in mind her odd behavior and possible injury. "Someone let him know he gets the floor." the teen muttered, giving his canine passenger a few side scratches.

They both pulled back and further down the aisle as two more

members of Hayashi's team trotted past, seemingly in a hurry, and one without his umbrella. Neither said a word until the clicks of their heels were covered by the hush of the rain. The green haired teen glanced back at Gum who was wiping her arms free of rain, which seemed to be a pretty impossible act, but he wasn't about to mention it. "Uhm…you look…tired." he tried with a quick shrug and sniff, rubbing along his eyes. What he would give for one of those umbrellas. Gum rubbed along her nose, but this appeared to cause her a sting of pain, wrenching her hand away before shoving it under her arm with the other. "We should…maybe find a place to hang for the night? I don't do so well sleepin' with the fishes, yo." he finished with a small grin, knowing the true meaning of the saying, but felt it was appropriate for the situation, all considering. It managed to pull a small smile on the girl's face, anyway.

"Any idea where Beat or…uh…Rhyth…might be?" he asked awkwardly, hugging the little creature close. It twisted his gut something awful thinking about earlier. Gum closed her eyes and pinched along the bridge of her nose, shaking her head out gently. She was lucky if this didn't explode into a full blown migraine, "No…I thought *you* were with Rhyth?"

"I thought you were with Beat." the boy snapped lightly, voice barely holding bark. Avoiding an explanation would be best…as least, for now. Gum glanced down the dangerous end of the alleyway, leaning along the wall behind her. "Beat…needs some time to cool off…" she answered oddly, nearly timid with a gentle break in the tone. This seemed to say it all. Furrowing his brows for a moment, Yoyo arched one as he reached his hand out slightly to…well, he wasn't sure exactly, but it shot back down to his side, rubbing along under his hood until the wet strands of green shot out in all different angles. It wasn't hard to assume what he had, but to *believe* it…that was a whole different deal. Could the boy have really? And to her?

"D-Did…Beat…" he started, swallowing his words the moment she glared at him, almost daring him to suggest what they both knew was possible and had already happened, "…s-say where he was going?" the younger teen finished awkwardly, pulling off his hood to whip his sopping hair. She didn't want to talk about it. He couldn't imagine the explosion that might've given away their hiding spot had

he, or the choke hold she might've put him in for merely suggesting it…but the situation alarmed Yoyo all the same. If Beat was willing to hurt someone he knew and was fond of…more so than the rest of the world…who knew what he could do to an innocent…?

Gum pulled him back to their world with a snap, his eyes following the spin her fingers did before trailing down to his gut, jetting at it with her thumb, "What are you smuggling?" she interrogated, giving it a firm but curious poke. She snatched her hand back as it wiggled with a bark, a snout poking out of Yoyo's neck hole with a lick to his chin. "Oh," the kid smiled with a shrug, giving the pup another rub, "It's just Potts." Arching a brow, Gum tilted her head as if hoping she could peek down the tiny bit of space left in the hole to see the rest of the dog.

"Potts?"

"Yeah, the spotty dog. I found him…started calling him Potts. He needs a name, don't you think?" he trailed off as the dog shoved its face as best it could to greet Gum. She gave him a small smile, rubbing the end of his nose before he ducked back into his makeshift shelter and into the comfortable grip of the teen holding him. "Me an Rhyth…sorta, uhm…split up," Yoyo said quietly, rubbing his own nose against his shoulder, realizing what he had said, "you know, to look for him." The odd save or the fact that he needed one had slipped by Gum altogether. That, or she didn't care. "Would she be around here?" she asked, glancing around as if Rhyth were going to pop up from any of the trashcans surrounding them. Yoyo paused for a minute in thought. It didn't look like she had yet come by, and if she was on her way, she would most likely be nearing their destination soon. He nodded silently, backing up as Gum slowly skated past him with a wave, "C'mon. Let's find her before the pigs do."

The odd tornado in his stomach was acting up again. He wasn't quite sure if he was ready to face her yet. "Well, she's bound to come here at some point. How about I stay here and you go…and just come back and get me if you find her." he offered, not entirely surprised by Gum's grim reaction to his suggestion. He kept quiet as he rubbed along Potts' ears, glancing off. "'Let's' often indicates a 'we', Yoyo…What's up with you?" she asked curiously, but he

responded stiffly, a bit sore about the whole ordeal. "Nothing."

"Good. We don't have time for nothing to be something. The cops are going to spread their search out in the streets. The question is when, and the answer to that is soon. They already know we're not in there, and if they come down both ends of *this* alley, we're fucked. At this point, I doubt you'll even get a chance at that orphanage again. Those times are long gone, kid. Your face is plastered as a rudie and Hayashi is going to want a bullet through every inch of it," she snapped, tugging at his free arm, "You like the taste of lead sandwiches?"

The shorter teen grumbled a "No," at the ridiculous question, but couldn't help but feel comforted by the girl's words. For some odd reason, he was receiving this as message of concern for his well being rather than a warning or threat on his life. Someone out there actually cared about him and preferred him alive over dead. It had been a while since he had felt safe among another, and though he had never had any siblings…there was always an opening for a select few…

She tugged him down the opposite end of where they had entered and jerked him around the corner, but he didn't mind. In fact, he allowed his arm to slip up with the help of the rain, and although her grip was tight, she couldn't keep the best hold on his skin. His fingers gripped onto hers, the leather of his gloves an easier texture to hang on to rather than skin, and she quickly squeezed them, pulling him into a shaded corner to avoid a trailing police car making its way uphill. She ignored his smile and pink cheeks, elbowing his side roughly before taking off again as if leading the blind, "Then stay close and quit complaining."

"Wet…cold…"

A rough sneeze.

"Sick! …And I never found that puppy!"

The girl brushed her bangs back, already annoyed with the lack of vision they were offering her and pushed up her wrist warmers, pausing for a moment to figure out her location. She had to be

nearby. She had been skating for nearly twenty minutes already… and not a sign of the others. "Where is everyone…?" she mumbled, wrapping her arms around herself as she slowly skated forward. The entire area seemed deserted as a matter of fact. Void of any normal people, anyway. Far off she could see the familiar flashing lights of the Gouji police force, illuminating one big blur into the rain. She furrowed her brows, a nasty pang hitting her chest. Those cars… wasn't that were the…

Eyes widening in fear, the girl in blue darted to her right, clinging to the shadows. As alarmed as she was, she couldn't risk being caught. She refused to go back. She wasn't going to live a lie. Fingers curling into fists, she tiptoed best she could into an alleyway, dodging behind a trashcan the moment a handful of officials stepped out from their alley entrance. Hey icy blues peered out from behind the metal can, gazing over at the cluster fully uniformed and fully armed, with their dainty little umbrellas and shimmering shoes. She wouldn't have put it past her folks if they had purchased it all. Crouching in further, she lost a bit of vision from what she was able to see, but was able to hear decently enough, all considering. One of the officers had quietly excused himself from yawning and was now questioning someone she had never hoped to see.

Standing within the center of the mini crowd was Captain Hayashi, face calm and serene which was beyond all odd. He looked rather bored, but there was something in the way he moved, the way he tweaked his mouth when he talked and that mysterious sparkle in his eye…

"Captain? Are we through with the search yet? We've torn out floorboards in this investigation; I don't think there's much left of that room aside from the doors." the middle aged man nodded, glancing off behind his higher up, and from where she was hiding, Rhyth could slightly make out the shapes making their way out of their alleyway and into a rather large moving truck. They were taking the tiny bit of home Beat owned…and to add insult in injury, both ragged couches had been sliced open unnecessarily so, victims of heartless slaughter rather than meaningless clues. The cooler had been set on fire, the burned box of plastic now sizzling as an officer kicked it to its destination, all ends and sides charred beyond recognition.

Pieces of floorboard were being carried out and piled alongside the bags of garbage forever ignored on that particular block. What had been the purpose of all this?

"What exactly are we searching for, sir? If anyone was living here, they're long gone now, and even so, what could they be hiding that hasn't been found by now? The room was practically empty."

"We've found what I've been looking for. We're just making sure things get as uncomfortable as possible for the little runts." he answered, gently digging in his coat pocket to reveal the tiny treasure in his hand. Pinched between his fingers was Rhyth's greatest nightmare. Her eyes grew as she capped her mouth, stomach dropping into an eternal abyss. How could she have been so *stupid* ? They were here for her. And Beat had paid the price for it. She grabbed her face and took a deep breath, clearing her mind. What now? Where could they all go? Hayashi was bound to know who she had been associating herself with, and without a doubt had access to the tapes revealing her animal break with Yoyo…

" *Yoyo!* " she thought, backing away from the trashcan on all fours, doing her best to push herself forward on her feet, " *The others! I have to warn them! I have to-* " She froze in thought, slamming her back against the chilly brick wall behind her. A nice jacket or sweatshirt would have done her some good, but she ignored the feeling, and concentrated on the fear growing in her chest, knees ready to buckle out under her. What if they were…what if Hayashi… that look on his face…

"… *If anyone was living here, they're long gone now…"*

No, they were fine. Long gone. They had to be. The young girl wrung her wrists over and over, completely ignoring the weather around her. Her skin bore goose bumps, though she felt nothing, and the rain had soaked her clean through, but it was entirely numbing to the touch. Her blue eyes merely stared out into the little huddled group with their black umbrellas and shiny shoes, wholly and utterly terrified. But for the first time ever…it wasn't for her own sake.

Shaking herself into reality, the blue girl closed her eyes and dashed

out of the alleyway she was hiding from, mind far from comprehending the dangerous consequences of her actions that could very well decide the fate of her future, but she merely cradled herself as she kept going, blind to everything around her. "They just have to be." she whispered, swimming in and around the massive storm, her lucky visual shield from the officers not too far off. She jumped along with a crack of thunder, hitting a chip in the concrete, and before she could gain her balance back, she slammed into a passerby. "I-I'm sorry! I-I didn't…" she cried frantically, unable to realize she was being throttled back and forth by her shoulders. Her nerves couldn't focus on the face before her, nor properly listen to the voice coming out until she felt a few rough slaps on her left cheek. The pain woke her from her stupor, shaking everything out before breathing out into her hands.

"Rhyth! Can you hear me? Calm down! You have to calm down!"

"Gum!" the girl whimpered, throwing her arms around her and squeezing her in tight. It wasn't something the older one entirely expected, however instinct demanded she cradle the other right back and soothe her until need be. She could barely skate anymore with the jerks and twitching her body was spazzing out, merely clinging onto her as her life support. "Gum…oh, Gum, there's something I have to tell you! The apartment! They took it! It's gone! Its-"

"I know."

Her voice seemed to cut colder than the wind around them. Rhyth released her, crossing one arm as the other held her face and covered her eyes. This couldn't be happening. She had been so close to freedom. Free to be who she wanted to be, with those who didn't mind that at all. She couldn't tell if tears had threatened to trail down her face. Everything mixed with the rain. The older girl whistled sharply, cracking through the rough texture of the water droplets and rumbling of the clouds. "I can't believe this…" she sighed, slowly rubbing along her eyes before lifting her neck up, "It's my fault they're there." Her voice was still and solemn, the owner of it confused of where it had come from while she let her arms hang, staring back where she had run from.

"What are you talkin' about?"

Her eyes broke from the void and trailed back to the teen she had parted with before the rain, silently puzzled about his unexpected appearance. Perhaps that's who Gum had whistled for. She swallowed roughly before glancing at her, meekly following her lead as did Yoyo. Where they were going, she had not a clue, but she was willing to go anywhere away from this street. The three remained quiet as they simply followed a less dangerous path and clung to anything that could easily hide them from sight. "…Rhyth?" His voice was tiny, and even more so because of the rush of nature, but his curiosity required an answer.

"He knows I was there," she whispered, cramming herself next to Gum as they darted under the arch of a building's stoop. It didn't keep them any less wet, but they were able to hide within the dark shadows of the small space. Yoyo shook his head out, the status of his hair the furthest possible thought in his mind. The rain rushed in at them in gusts, but from above they were granted peace, and for that he was thankful for. He rubbed at his face, wishing he had nothing more than a towel to pat his face dry and coat his head as a safety blanket. Without shelter, they were as good as dead. "…He found my…ring…"

The green haired teen froze momentarily, clutching the pup in his grip too tightly for the canine's comfort, and a slow whine eased out from his throat, poking his snout up and through Yoyo's neck hole. He snorted into the boy's neck, offering it a few comforting licks, and it was during this time that Rhyth realized the undetected fourth member of the group. She pointed a rickety accusatory figure at the slightly shorter teen, mouth agape as she tried to find the words that refused to make themselves heard. He offered her a weak smile, cradling the dog's body as he slowly unrolled the sticking material upwards, but Potts refused to be freed from his safe house, or the slight warmth the teen's body had been hosting. His legs squirmed around into the boy's chest, tail curling in tight with a small whine of dejection, and Yoyo sighed softly, pulling at his neck hole instead. Within seconds the pup's head popped out with a meek bark, sniffing about until he caught sight of the two other humans, excitement abusing the poor boy's chest. "Ow, ow, ow, okay, buddy,

calm down! Down, boy, down!" he grimaced, leaning towards Rhyth with her awaiting hand to be sniffed.

Her hand curved along the pup's perked ears, scratching him gently while he sniffed and licked (or tried to), and his mini tail prodded Yoyo's stomach to no end. "I'd take him out, but he doesn't like the thunder and he'll cl-aw…" he winced as the dog tried to jump, leaving a good fresh trail of marks under his second skin of a shirt. Her eyes warmed up with a hint of a timid smile, trailing under the dog's chin as best she could much to his enjoyment. The thunder above threatened with a slight rumble, and the dog's head was no more, dug quickly into Yoyo's armpit. "You found him…" she stated quietly, her voice warm…far away. The boy's head hung limply for a moment before giving her a quick nod, unsure where to go from there. He couldn't help but still feel awkward over his unanticipated eavesdropping, but he was quite sure this was neither the place nor time to discuss the matter, even if he did know how to casually bring the subject up.

"Rhyth…what do you mean he found your ring?"

The two held a slight staring contest before gazing over at Gum, nearly forgetting her presence among them. She was leaning against the chilled bricks of the arch, staring off into the empty street, the tiny droplets running down her helmet without direction. She was drifting off into that same world again, Yoyo noticed, ducking his head as another crack whipped through the air. Flushing a bit, the blue haired girl wrung her left wrist, eyes unable to hold up. "I-I..uhm…m-my eng-gagement…one…" she stammered, biting down on her lip as soon as it was out. Gum's eyes flickered for a moment as they fell on the girl, closing for just seconds until she sighed, "Of all the…God…" The blush deepened.

Remaining silent, Yoyo merely glanced out into the world, viewing it like a giant window. He couldn't help but feel a tad guilty over this situation. Perhaps if he hadn't been so curious…so determined to see what the girl was hiding in her hands…maybe she wouldn't have thrown it there in the apartment. It would've been a useful tool during a pawn shop trade or simply anywhere else but where it had been found…He forgot to breathe. Wiping the side of his face with his shoulder, the boy sighed into his sleeve, and Potts sighed along with

him. This time he ignored the rumble within the clouds. The truth was far scarier and unexpected than something he could easily anticipate. She wasn't to blame for this unfortunate event.

He was.

"W-Where are we going?"

It was the first thing anyone had said in over forty five minutes, the silence among them deathly quiet. Only their skates voiced their opinions: scratchy, harsh, and cold. All three were exhausted from the downcast weather, quite on the breaking point of their patience, with it, and each other. The meek teen had never been in such a stew and had been undoubtedly unprepared for it, the shorter coming to terms with reality that homes would no longer be open to him, and what he earned would be result of his own good self. He swallowed hard as he clutched the pup in his grip, slightly fearful of what was to come…what could come…and what wouldn't. If he could only get out of this weather…think straight for a moment…He focused on his breathing. In. Out. In. Out. Not too quickly. Not too quickly. Okay…got it…just breathe in…and out…

He couldn't afford to hyperventilate now. He was positive they were fresh out of bags and doubted anyone was willing to drag his unconscious body down the street to safety. They had been following Gum loyally the entire journey, weaving in and out of streets, behind cars, between alleys, and over, through, and even under a few fences. The further they trailed, the darker the streets became, both visually and emotionally. The buildings loomed overhead, tilting sinisterly in the dark without a single light in sight. Aside from a choice few, the street lamps seemed to be burned out, picking and choosing which stoops to light up, dots among the abyss floating around them. Litter scattered around as the gusts picked up, paper waste sticking to anything it attached itself to, cans rolling from side to side if not being tossed. Running her hand through her hair, Rhyth kept close to the little group, making sure she kept an eye on Gum's every move. She wasn't about to lose them in a strange place as this. She wasn't familiar with these parts, and it seemed as if very few people were. Most of the buildings were sloppily boarded up, doors missing, windows gone if not broken, and even caution tape lining along one stoop in particular. The area

looked abandoned, as they all were in their own way.

Clearing her throat a bit, the girl tried again, taking into account their number. Something was wrong. They had been missing someone… and only now (due to the high stress) had she realized it. "W-Where's Beat? Shouldn't w-we find h-him?" she chattered, rubbing the sides of her arms, but this warmed nothing. Gum nearly tripped as she made the next turn, sharp as could be. "I don't know," she snapped darkly before the girl could ask again, knowing she would. It was an honest question and no one had been with him last aside from her, so they couldn't possibly know. Couldn't understand. Such…such hate.

Yoyo…he saw something…knew something, but she wasn't going to talk. Not until things were solved out. Not until she was ready. She had pups under her wing, and felt responsible, if not obligated to get these humans (and dog, respectfully) into a shelter where they could be safe. Dark times, indeed.

"Keep up, I'm not slowing down for anyone." she growled, another sharp turn ahead. They were nearly there. "We're heading to an old friend's place. He's locked up right now, but the apartment should be free. Only a couple of rudies know about it, and I don't want you two blabbing your mouths off about it. It isn't a headquarters or anything, but more like an underground safe house to be used in utmost emergencies." She paused her skating as she counted what seemed to be the buildings in front of her before darting off again. Glancing around before chasing after, Yoyo rubbed along his chilled cheek, tugging his hood over his head, "I'd say we hit the mother lode of emergencies." the teen coughed out, pulling back a sniff. He could feel the cool frosting its way down in his bones, unable to believe it had been so disgustingly humid a few hours before. He just wanted to sleep. Close his eyes and not need to wake up for a long while. The boy lifted his head, trying to pull the material from his vision by stretching his neck alone, but it wasn't working as planned. Instead he looked rather foolish, struggling with himself before simply tugging it back with a pinch of his fingers, leaving it at the brim of his eyebrows. Always had to do it the hard way first.

His mother always did say he lived for the rotten taste of medicine rather than avoiding it all together. His thumb ran across the back of

the young pup's fur, receiving a quick lick in recognition. " *I miss you guys…* " His eyes lifted up to the murky, sodden sky, gazing at the treacherous clouds as they loomed above, growling at him every so often. Is that where it was?

No…couldn't be. It wasn't even close to what he had always imagined it to be. It was always…calmer…warm, and slightly welcoming, like sleep crooning you back after consciousness threatened to start the day. The wind picked up for a moment, rushing into his face with a fresh wave of droplets. No…it just couldn't be.

But if not there…then, where?

He rubbed his nose with the palm of his glove, but it made no difference. He could barely feel what was attached to his face. " *Everything's a mess…never thought it was gunna end up this way, huh?* " The speed in his step was beginning to lack, but he took no notice of this. He blinked slowly for a moment, lost in thought as his feet continued to move, but with less determination. " *You guys know I did the right thing…right? My friends need me now…I sort of…sort of have a new family…* " His brows furrowed. He didn't like the sound of that. It left a bad taste in his mouth.

"… *Actually…we've added on to ours.* "

Much better.

" *You always did say all we had was each other.* " His eyes tenderly floated down, realizing how far behind he had fallen, leaning forward in a mad dash in case Gum decided to make a rough turn before he could pinpoint it. " *Looks like you were right.* "

By the time he caught up with the girls, he was out of breath. Time never seemed to be on their side, but today had drained them of any luck they had been running on. His throat burned as he tried to take a deep breath, but the rain managed to suck in through his nose, the burning sensation shooting up and into what felt like his brain. He snorted for a moment, wiping his face grimly. He glanced over, corners of his mouth pulled while his ears sharpened best they could to the whisper Rhyth was presumably trying to direct at him. Brows

furrowing, the teen skated a bit closer, tilting her neck over as his sunk in. It wasn't that he wasn't interested in what she had to say. She had already proven to be quite an interesting girl, if not one of the most interesting, in his opinion. But the approximate intimacy she was innocently performing was throwing his nerves for a loop ever so slightly, and he wasn't entirely sure he favored this.

His eyes darted to the ground before glancing back up at her, trying to form the word in his mind as her lips moved silently, her icy blues occasionally peeking at Gum in alert. Beat had been right…he couldn't get emotionally involved or attached…who knew where they were all headed in the near future? The goggled hothead was already missing from the picture, and they were all out of a home as far as he could say. This safe house could only last a few days at most. They were going to have to search out and about as soon as the storm passed over, and hopefully by then the cops would be out of the area in search of them elsewhere. They were on a run for their lives. " *Freedom always did look better in the movies…* " Well, if he was going to be free, he was going to have to earn it. And the price was looking mighty high.

But…Beat had been scoping the streets for a few years now without the protection or assistance of anyone. If he could do it, then surely Yoyo had a chance…Beat….Beat…

… *Beat!*

The teen's eyes widened as he realized the secret code Rhyth had been repeating, looking quite frustrated with his lack of understanding. He opened his mouth quickly, snapping it back shut as the pup popped his entire head out into Yoyo's jaw, cutting his teeth straight into his tongue. He squeaked before running the injured muscle into his cheek, ignoring the strange glance Gum gave over her shoulder. He glared as best he could at the little mutt, but his anger slowly melted with the animal's affections, finding him the best comfort of all. He had a little creature to protect and care for. Man's best friend. " *You can't get attached…* "

Giving the dog a rough rub along his back, Yoyo held him close, resting his chin along the canine's head and smiled when he felt the stub of a tail poke into his gut once more. It was too late. He was far

too attached. Wherever and whatever life was about to throw at them, they were going to face it together. His small smile fell away as he realized the girl next to him was losing her patience. He gave her an honest shrug, looking around for a moment before doing it again. Her arms hung loosely around her, eyes to the street. He could tell she was disappointed in the answer…in the situation…in herself…in them all. Could they have done better? Perhaps. But all in all, they *were* just kids. The boy's brows furrowed for a moment, realizing their predicament as if for the very first time. The world was literally going at them…grown adults on a bounty for their heads… ready and willing to pull a gun on an unarmed teenager…

There had to be something wrong with the picture. Where they really such a threat that death would be overlooked in their extermination? These were *people* …children in most cases…barely growing out of their own shells to be popped off by the ones all looked to for protection and service? Who was running this little operation? To have so much power and pick off humans like flies…to be willing to end anyone who posed even the lightest of an unorganized threat? His right eye winced in thought, chewing along the inside of his cheek. Someone had to do something…this was crazy. His heart pounded lightly as he brushed the thoughts away. He had to focus on the present. Day dreaming would get him nowhere.

"If you mention him again, I'm dropping you off here. Just shut your face for one second. Can't you see I'm trying to figure out where we're going?"

The green haired teen dug his chin into his hood, peering out from the heavy lid of his hooded cap. Apparently it had led him straight into an argument. As Gum spun off rougher than need be, Yoyo leisurely pulled his view towards Rhyth, doing his best to keep it in his peripheral, undetected. Her cheeks were red enough as it was, there was no need to further aggravate it, nor pay too much mind to the tears welling in her eyes. It was then that he realized the poor pup was whining in his grip as if the yell had been intended for him. It was small, but high, breaking in between breaths, an undecided howl debating on its entry. Both arms wrapped around the little mutt, hushing him into a nervous licking frenzy. His wet nose poked and prodded the arms, lolling a tongue over the rudie's elbow as he

finally decided to rest his head in the nook.

Swallowing briskly, the teen shuddered, feeling quite cold…and it had nothing to do with the weather. He couldn't get involved. Doing so could possibly prevent him a comfortable dorm…he couldn't afford to lose that. Is this what it felt like to truly be on your own? To only care about yourself? To only afford to care for yourself? Mind your own business. You'll last longer.

Survival of the fittest.

His stomach twisted coarsely. The very idea of Rhyth being placed on a lower level of some roughly sketched out food chain did not sit well. The boy shook his head, crouching in tightly, keeping the jagged pace of the girl before him.

The leader of this miniature group simply stared ahead, emotionless, unrealistic. It wasn't something ever quite experienced before in all her years of roaming the streets, fending for herself as it was. She knew she was alive (the tingle in her nose was a continual reminder), but the world felt fake and plastic, her body habitual and robotic, and she, a mere passenger trapped within the subconscious. In this empty theatre, her mind relayed the redhead's expressions, words, actions…his frame shrinking before she could gather herself up. He had left her…alone…to suffer…alone. The blood…there had been blood.

But not hers.

Perhaps…that was the reason why the boy had dispersed. Thought he had done enough damage to prove his might, to declare his right as alpha male. She sniffed quietly. If that had been his purpose, his reason…he was wrong. It was the blood collecting inside his gloves from his own wounds that had splattered like a filled sponge, not that it eased the pain any. He *had* cracked her nose, leaving the memory lodged in her brain. Her nose sniffed once more. But…Gum was nearly positive he hadn't intended to hit her like that…at all, in fact. His face had nearly broken in horror, the regret an instant jolt of electric pain shooting right from the chest. Still…the helmeted woman released a stiff sigh, her lead less aggravated. The rich one had only been worried about him. They considered him on friendly

terms, though he often barked through a personal wired fence, locked away in his own safe zone. But Gum could only handle so much, between the real world and her mind. It was she who had been with him during the police take over, she who had tried to console him when he broke down, and how had he repaid her?

She knew what it was like to have everything stripped from her. She had never had family at any point in her life…a guardian…caring friends to raise her as their own. Why? Why had she been allowed to scrounge the earth, fight nail and tooth for everything, and grow a leather hide in order to protect herself from all human kind? All thanks to a bright mind who couldn't keep her legs shut. What was that word Yoyo had used to describe one who actually gave a shit? Oh…right…mother. The word felt strange in thought and icky on the tongue. It wasn't right to use a term that described something completely different than the thing being depicted. Like labeling a fresh pile sweet as roses. Mother. She didn't deserve such an esteemed title.

And the man who couldn't hold back. Where was *that* bastard?

Did neither truly care where she would end up? Did he even know she existed?

If she had turned out a brilliant student or…some scavenger on the streets?

Well, where the hell did they expect her to turn up? She had neither of them her entire life, solely depending on herself. Odd end jobs, stealing when necessary, home to home, meal to meal, day by day. Well, she was an artist. She hadn't strayed too far off the ideal road map for such a career. However, she had only herself to thank for it, and not one other. Not one fucking other.

Her throat tightened for a moment before she slammed the truth down. She had to be honest. The scum of the earth weren't so bad once you got to know them. They all had their own stories, own experiences, own horrors. They were like an underground family and it was there where she had met him. Quite a few years back, he had been much shorter then, but all the same quiet. He spoke when he needed to, and not much more, but there was something about

him that demanded her respect, and she gave it to him. Her devotion bloomed into a filling in her life, something she had been missing from most of it, able to, for once in her life, claim that she could honestly trust someone. She would trust him with her life…this friend…this brother. And she dearly loved him as one. But where was he now?

And where was she?

Trekking across town with a load on her back, responsible and doubtful all at once. If only he could see her now. " *What the hell have you gotten yourself into, girl? Looks like you're Gummin' up the skates.* "

Clever.

But it was her turn to care for these two noobs, show the ropes and teach the basics. Survival of the fittest, as he had done for her long ago. The young woman shook her head, nearly tripping over a fire hydrant. Taking a deep breath, Gum allowed herself to fall back into the rainy world, the one where a cold chill was real and the possibility of catching illness was even more so. Couldn't let the past interfere with her mood or thinking. Look what it had done to Beat.

Her brown eyes lifted up, face as solemn as stone. She knew this place. Most labeled it the ass end of Dogenzaka, and for good reason. True to its name, the area was located furthest of Shibuya, and for obvious reason. There was nothing but rundown projects here. The buildings were grimy, looming over the streets they skated on without an ounce of life within them. Alleyways continued on into a murky abyss, the contents within impossible to determine. And truth be told, the only form of life around appeared to be them. Not a single window was shimmering with light, leaving the teens to feel even more overwhelmed if possible. They were completely alone.

Probably for the best. People rarely came down these streets and if they did, they were far from welcome. The ones who ran this little portion of town were of rudie descent: trained, willing, and surviving. Cops had yet to follow one down this far. Here, they would be safe. She was sure of it. But as sure as Gum was about the location of this safe house, Rhyth lacked to share the approval, chills running

up and down her spine as her eyes darted from here to there, neck swinging back and forth between alleys on either side of them, just waiting for something or someone to run out and do who knows what. There was nothing to protect themselves with. They were helpless. Their skates echoed into the darkness, and the scratching faintly returned, possibly the only sound aside from rain pittering along the blacktop. Twitching ever so slightly, the girl in blue inched herself closer to the only male (or males, including the little pup) in the group, completely unprepared for anything that might come their way.

Within the clutch of the teen, Potts growled deeply, sniffing through the soaked hood, past the material and the boy's natural scent to something much further away. Arching a brow, Yoyo glanced down but hurried towards his left as did the girls when three territorial hounds threw themselves against the chain link blocking them from protecting what they believed was rightfully theirs. They growled and drooled, shoving their snouts into the gaps of the fence as if daring the teens to edge any closer. One pulled back and simply sat, sticking out its neck in curiosity over where these three invaders were planning to go. Gum ignored this keen watch as she snapped quietly, skating over to a building three structures down and patted the brick and cement rail connected to the damp and cracked steps leading up. The two behind her paused for a moment as she jiggled the handle of the iron gate, hinging it open with a long and tired whine behind the one it was attached to. Their interest, however, was on the building itself.

The bricks were dark and now even darker with the lack of light and dampness of the rain seeping through; windows, or what was left of the frames, boarded up with bits of two-by-fours, some collapsed on the ground from either harsh winds or prying hands. Occasional debris flew by, but not the stack of newspapers strangely towering between the double side doors, giving the illusion that gravity was going to attack sooner or later, but it stuck with a slight lean, determined to stay together in a massive paper mache heap. Gum kicked aside a dented can as she climbed under the square shaped arch past the gate, choosing the door to the right. Her hand grasped against the wet metal, furrowing her brow as she turned it left and right, but the lock would not budge. Yoyo glanced around behind

them; he couldn't help but feel something was off about this place. He crouched for a moment, nearly losing his balance on his skates while he reached out for something that didn't quite belong in this land of dreary greys. It was a fragment of a bright yellow caution tape.

His shoulders lurched before he got up, peering over his shoulder wide eyed at the current leader of the little group kicking away at the remaining door glass she had just shattered. Making sure every little scrap was gone, she ducked down into the bottom half of the door with a wave of her hand behind her. " *Just like a doggy door…* " The teen shook his head, following Rhyth who disappeared into the darkness of the opening. Squatting through, the boy carefully placed his hand on the wall rather than the edge of the door, avoiding any unnecessary accidents at all costs. He tore at his hood, running a hand through the matted mess of awkward spikes before clearing his throat with a relieved sigh, thankful to be out of the rain. Against his gut, the pup fidgeted, but after a quick scan of the dangerous obstacles under his skates, Yoyo decided against giving him his freedom just yet.

Rhyth was peeling off her wrist warmers while Gum wrung out the edge of her dress, both quiet enough for the rain to overpower the concept of thought. The sky rumbled ever so slightly, and Yoyo leaned his back against the peeling wall, his curiosity getting the best of him, "Does *anyone* live here?" The blond removed her helmet, shaking out her own locks. Only the top didn't seem to be touched by rain. "Not that I know of. Not anymore." She made her way to the stairs trailing up the wall on their left, facing opposite of them, "Like I said, the dude who owns this apartment, or lived in it, really…he's in jail now, so no one's here…or is *supposed* to be…" the young woman trailed off quietly, glancing into the mini hall on the right at the base of the steps. The boy's question had amped her vigilance of the world around her. They were only truly safe once inside that apartment. Out here was as risky as the alleyways…and a scream wouldn't travel so far. Shaking herself free of the jitters, she slightly grumbled at the thought of fearing any human and wished she could smack the teen upside the head for suggesting the possibility of anything menacing within their safe house. How like anyone but herself to worry about such things. Why couldn't

anything be what it was? A safe house was supposed to be safe. And now…

Her hand gripped along the shaky wooden rail of the stairwell, her tug shaking it a bit in her efforts to keep balance using her skates. The clench of her jaw tightened when Yoyo piped up again, "Kinda rickety, huh?" Rhyth glanced over the rail at the glass covered floor below, her skates clomping along with the others in an eerie silence; the break in sound hardly felt soothing. Everything here was abandoned. The apartments, the buildings, the streets…the entire block. At least the apartment being infiltrated had life passing by once in a while, and cars passing through the night. It didn't leave her feeling so…alone in the world. This place…it was unwelcoming…frozen…disturbing, so unlike the warm, soothing safety cradle that was Beat's apartment. But this was their last resort. An emergency. There was no room for choice.

Gum led them all the way to the seventh floor, the topmost and by far most unwelcoming hall of all. Due to the height of the seventh story, there was no way for the dimmed street lights to give even the slimmest beam of illumination, thick masses of shadows curling in around the doorways and rafters on the ceiling. And although each door was sealed shut (with tape or wood), Rhyth couldn't shake the feeling that *anyone* could be hiding in there, and it was puncturing the air out of the safety of this home. What if some psycho was just biding his time, carving a shiny knife in the cool breeze of an open window? Waiting for someone…anyone…them…to walk right past… right into their trap…

Without another thought to further distraught her mind, the girl's hand poked through the gap between Yoyo's free arm and his torso, inching closer with every quiet step they took. The boy's cheeks flushed a bit as he tucked his smile into his hood, not bothering to notice the tight grip she had on him or the odd stain on the wall she was staring at, slightly bashful that she was seeking comfort in him. He glanced ahead at Gum, wondering if the one next to him would have reacted the same way had Beat been present instead of him. His confidence slowly died down, leaving him more skeptical of himself, if anything. She could seek reassurance in anyone beside her, really. As long as they were real and nonthreatening. That sea

serpent of a beast, for example. His brows dug lower. Why had she been so standoffish with him before? What had he lied about?

Gum stopped at the end of the shadowed hall, unlit by much of anything, and turned to the only door that wasn't locked with a pad or boarded up. She tore some more of the caution tape off, tossing it to the floor beside her before dusting her hands, crouching down for a moment to gather her courage in order to lift the dirty, wet welcome mat. But she only found more floor beneath it. She released the disgusting thing, slowly towering back up while wiping her hand against the wall, "Where would he put that thing…" She glanced around at the limited choices she had, crossing her arms as Yoyo complied with the pup's whines to set him free. Gently he unveiled the spotted dog, setting him down tenderly as if to help him learn his balance. He gave a small yawn, stretching forward then back before shaking out his entire body from the moisture he was forced to endure. Sniffing around, the young pup perked his ears, trotting off towards the opposite end of the hall.

Rhyth arched her back in sudden alarm, but it was Yoyo who pulled away from her grip, taking a step towards the darkness, his concern for the dog more powerful than he realized, "Uhm, Potts…C'mere, boy. Stay over here." The empty lantern attached to the wall clicked as Gum pulled her hand out from under the lid, a rusty little key in tow. The lock clunked when she turned the key, but arched a brow at the teen edging further and further away from them. Just where did he think he was going? "Potts?" She glanced at Rhyth who was pondering the name in curiosity, eying Yoyo intriguingly, her fear slightly dissipated for the moment. A light tuneless whistle broke through the air, and the scratching of the dog's claws ticked nearer with each bound. The pup circled the boy's feet, rear happily shaking as Yoyo squatted down to greet him. He popped up in excitement, fat paws gripped on the teen's knee, appreciating the affectionate scratch he was receiving. "Gotta stay close, boy. Can't lose you again." he murmured, shyly smiling at Potts' affectionate lick as he picked him up under his front legs. He cradled him lightly as he turned around, the dog sticking out a paw into the boy's saggy hood as a balance, tongue panting happily.

"Potts, huh?"

Yoyo looked up at Gum, her slight smirk barely showing in the darkness, but eyes bright enough to withstand their own. Rhyth was watching him with a small smile of her own, her arms wrapped behind her. He could feel his cheeks filling up, like he had been caught by a school teacher ready to chew him out in front of the class, and dug half of his face into the pup's neck, a quick sniff of his ear stating that they were now even. Never had the teen ever been given the chance to be responsible over something as large as a dog, and he could remember years ago begging for a puppy, just one little puppy, it was no big deal, I'd wash him, and feed him, and play with him, and make sure he doesn't make a mess, and according to his parents he just hadn't been the right age for a dog…at the time. Maybe next year, they said, much to his disappointment. Maybe next year.

The thing about maybes is that they rarely ever come true. Especially if your parents aren't around to make it happen. His fingers scratched along the pup's back, receiving a paw tap to the shoulder. "Well…you know…he needs a name…and…well…" the green haired rudie stumbled with a shrug, holding the dog close as if someone were ready to steal him away. Gum kept her smile as she pushed the door open with a light heave, more mass darkness ready to instantly greet her. Be it far from her to part a boy and his dog. She thought it rather heartwarming for Yoyo to take such interest in the little guy. Rhyth slowly followed, giving him a tender eye before allowing the darkness of the room to engulf her as well.

"… *I'm more of a dog person* ."

It certainly seemed so.

Slowly rolling in, Yoyo squinted hard, praying he wouldn't bump into something or anyone and possibly injure himself, Potts, or both. Light suddenly flooded the room from the right corner, exploding a series of spots everywhere for all three of them. Rubbing his eyes roughly, the boy blinked blindly for a moment, taking the time to gather his surroundings: peeling walls of ancient paint or wallpaper (he couldn't be sure which was what anymore by the look of it), a small square folding table with one chair collapsed on its side in the left corner, a much loved leather recliner in the right, a broken down and out of order refrigerator adjacent to it, and quite useless

considering there wasn't any running electricity in the building, and one copper colored battery powered lamp that compared with Gum in height, a flat disk on top to flatten out and diffuse the sleepy yellow light into the entire room. There were two doors in the corner of this room, both in the right hand back corner near the recliner. Sighing, the blond set her helmet on the table, lifting the fallen chair to take a seat. Finally. They were here. Not all, but most.

Brushing her hair back with her fingers, she shook her head, leaning forward to remove her skates. Her legs were tired from the trek, thighs sore and calves aching. Tossing the heavy weights to the side, she stretched her toes, leaning back with her head against the wall. Too many things. Just too many. The door slightly whined as Rhyth took charge of making sure they were going to be safe for the night, her nose scrunching as she paused, poking her head out into the hall for a moment. Slowly, the girl's neck pulled back in, closing the door behind her with a swift turn of the lock, "It smells like urine out there…"

Yoyo glanced back biting his bottom lip, looking over to Gum with a meek flushed grin while setting the pup on the floor. Her annoyed glare was enough for the blame. "Guess we'll have to work on that…" he said quietly, rubbing Potts' head before stretching up, tugging off the bulky hood sponged up with three pounds of water, if not more. It slipped from his hands before he could straighten it out, nearly claiming the pup just inches off. It landed with an awkward plop, and all three stared for a moment before Gum stood, her weight creaking along the floorboards of the old apartment. Potts looked up at his master with a disapproving snort, shaking himself once more before rubbing his body against the wall to dry himself.

"I can get you guys some dry clothes, hang on."

She disappeared into the room ahead, vaguely remembering where everything was. Nothing much had changed. The bedroom still had the old box spring queen sized bed, only a different set of covers from the ones she remembered. Red they had been, and now, a faded blue. Beside it was the wooden nightstand, a dusty radio placed on it crookedly, batteries popped out most likely for more important things, and the dresser in the corner, a dusty and fingerprint covered mirror hanging just above on the wall. She curled

her fingers between the metal gold painted hanger knobs, the humidity chipped paint peeling off into her grip. "Ugh…" It had been a while since anyone was in here. Her hands crawled through the masses of clothing within the drawer: colors, styles, and sizes ample enough to find *something* for her friends to wear.

Under her arm carried a ball of clothing intended to fit as best they could, her feet padding along the wood. "Here. If there's anything wrong with them, you can always just go through the drawers and find something yourself. There's loads of sizes," she yawned slightly, stretching the muscles in her neck from side to side while she tossed Yoyo a black tee, some clean boxers (or at least they looked clean), and a pair of polyester mesh shorts, "You're a small guy, these should fit. And even if they're not cut to size, its only to sleep with, really. Not trying to kill your image or anything." She handed Rhyth a white tank top and navy blue shorts with a soft warm robe to rid the chills running up and down her arms and legs.

"Our clothes should be dry by morning," the eldest said quietly, nodding at the other girl in the room. Her eyes feel on Yoyo's hood, still splatted on the floor. "That's going to take a while…and your shorts, too. The material's a bit thick." she noted, but he merely shrugged, too tired to care and pleased he had something to change into. At this point, he hardly cared for any privacy, peeling off the white tee shirt glued onto his skin, the bumps of the cold giving him a rough exterior. A thick piece of material flew at his head, blocking out everything for a second. He grabbed at it, pulling it out of his eyes and kept it on his head, rubbing hard. It was a towel. Thin, but durable.

The door to Gum's right clicked shut, her smirk managing to hold off as he freed his head in a mess of stringy spikes, hanging the towel around his neck to pick up the mess he had made on the floor.

"Might want to give a heads up the next time you have yourself a little strip tease," she whispered, tone hushed and secretive. She nodded her head towards the bathroom door, "Not all of us are so bold to the world." Yoyo buried his head under his towel once more, attention focused only on getting himself dry. The bedroom door clicked, leaving him limited time to switch into his new clothes. Pulling his elbows behind his head in a back crack, the teen shoved

his skates next to the recliner, an odd and slightly disturbing thought filling his head. He was in someone else's boxers. He shoved the awkward chills away. Couldn't think of that now. There were worse things. Now…where to put his less than desirable clothing? It wasn't like he had…much of a choice. His face screwed up into a distress of hopelessness. It seemed the only choice he had ever had was finally getting away from the homes…the rest, a progression of unfolding misfortunes, one predicament after the next…and this was without a gang in tow. He could only imagine the trouble being in one could attract. The boy's chest heaved after setting his hood on top of the fridge and his shorts on the table, his old boxers pressed flatly underneath them, throwing himself face first into the old recliner, an explosion of dust bursting into the air all around him.

A groan.

He just wanted to sleep. There was nothing more his body begged for. Shifting his face up, he squinted past the little dust particles floating around, sneezing as soon as he got a whiff of them. Shifting on his side, Yoyo tugged at the side bar, pulling out the footrest. If he laid back, it could do as a bed. He peeled his gloves off, tossing them next to his skates with a yawn, doing his best to make himself comfortable. Eyes nearly shut, they jarred open as a hefty mass flew out from nowhere, bounding from the teen's legs to his gut, with a wiggle against the fabric of clothing to dry himself. "Well, *excuse* me, yo." the boy chuckled as the dog rolled on his side and glanced at the teen, back leg kicking out while his free ear perked up. Yoyo gazed down at him fondly, a tender hand resting along the small dog's head, brushing back to his neck, the little tail wagging in approval. Half of his face was covered, half dug into the boy's tee, finding both comfort and warmth in his boy, his free eye gazing back until slowly closing, the electricity in his tail softly dying out. And soon Yoyo found himself following the same trail his puppy was sniffing along, where things were peaceful, quiet, and anything but dangerous.

The left door opened with a gentle click, revealing the thin skater, robe wrapped around her snuggly. She had hung her clothing inside the bathroom, on the towel rack and along the tub, trusting of the other female's words that everything would be dry by morning. She

sniffed softly, skates in hand while she walked to where the boy had placed his own fabrics, tucking her skates underneath the table. Inside the bathroom she had the opportunity to do some thinking, and those thoughts had felt her feeling somewhat guilty. It wasn't fair that he had no idea why she was feeling the way she was. It wasn't fair that she was feeling the way she was. And it wasn't fair that they hadn't had the time to talk about anything much else than survival. She wasn't used to everything being so difficult. How was one to learn about life if everyone lived it for you? Someone had selected her character and clicked expert by accident. It was the only explanation she could think of. She couldn't imagine a higher power wishing any harm on her…she had always done right, or tried her best to.

She cleared her throat lightly, turning as she sat on the empty seat. Perhaps now was the time to clarify any mess between them. Then she would be able to rest easy. Yes, that would do. But as her eyes fell on the scene before her, she couldn't help but keep quiet and smile shyly, curling up with her head against the wall so the cozy little duo could rest together in serenity.

Gum sat on the edge of the old spring bed, staring out at the sky. Dark, grey…cold, stiff…empty and unaided. She sniffed, a reaction she had been experiencing ever since Beat had smashed her nose. The young woman glared out the window, wondering why she even cared when he hardly gave a shit about any of them. Everything had been pulling teeth with him, and now he was finally apart from them. He wanted that the whole time, didn't he? Bitched and groaned, throwing piss fits over any little thing, ready to spit an insult in the blink of an eye.

But then, he had stood up for them when it counted…stood up for her…

Sitting up a little, she ignored the damp spot on the bed she had left. She had yet to change out of her clingy dress, the water droplets dripping down her legs as she debated. Debated whether she was going to change or not. She could simply find something comfortable and dry to wear, lie in the comfy bed behind her, and stare hour after hour at the ceiling, wondering what had become of the redhead spitfire…or she could wait until the kids were asleep…

Tracking was a hard task to do alone, but she couldn't bring them. She just couldn't risk it. They would worry. They would slow everything down. They could possibly get into more trouble than it was worth. And without any tagalongs, no one would be victim to her vicious mood in the current. But when she found Beat… *if* she found him, of course…what then? What would she say? What could she say? Nothing would exactly have him come willingly, not in the mindset he was in. And she wasn't in the mood to threaten…pulling off the threat would require too much energy that she just didn't have. And if he dared to raise another hand to her…"I'll destroy him…" she snorted, glancing back over her shoulder at the light fading in under her door. She'd need her skates.

Tiptoeing to the corner of the door, she silently pulled it open, a small smirk tugging at her lips. Green was knocked out, cuddled up with the pup like a long lost teddy that had been recently discovered, and Blue curled up with her knees against her chest, head nodded along the wall with her chin dug into the snug of the robe. Perfect. She inched along and gathered up her skates, freezing when the dog whined for a moment, throwing out a kick before digging his nose into the nook of the teen's elbow, tail wagging twice before resting. Shaking her head, Gum reached up and snapped the light off, cooling off the room with a blanket of shadows. They would be more than enough company for each other should any wake up, and it wasn't like she was trapping a pair of enemies with each other. Yoyo and Rhyth…She quietly smiled, an air chuckle firing from her chest. They got along. Got along quite well.

Closing the door behind her, she rushed over to the window, unlocking the old hinges, but rested her head against the cool glass, watching the little rain drops trickle down. " *He doesn't deserve the amount of fuck I give.* " Her fingers ran down the pane, ending at the lip and lifted it, ducking out into the fire escape. There was only one thing she could imagine him doing at the moment, and she had to stop him at all costs.

Author's Note: OMG FINALLY. I took forever editing this, because I felt an edit was needed and will be needed for the rest. I think I made this chapter 3x as long as it was originally going to be. Added

so much and molded so much more. And I want to thank my friend Panda who would not rest until I had this sucker up and running. I promise to all who are still miraculously reading this that it will have an ending and I plan to finish it. Took years, but this bad boy is still up and running until my very last chapter. RAWR! And I'd like to thank everyone who's reading this, sending me reviews and faving. It warms my heart that people are still reading this old thing. ^^